

From out of the past come the
thundering hoofbeats of the great horse Silver.
1 The Lone Ranger rides again!

THE LONE RANGER

by Fran Striker

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THE NIGHT LEGION!

The valley seemed an eerie place, with only the soft clump of hoofs to break the deathlike stillness.

The Lone Ranger and Tonto felt a foreboding of evil, something unexplainable in the air. Yet there was no sound. The horses, too, felt it. Though no command was given, they slowed their pace until they barely moved.

A shaft of light struck down as the moon broke through the clouds for a moment. The Lone Ranger bolted upright, pulling on Silver's reins. The pale light reflected from the face of a man directly ahead and slightly above the Lone Ranger.

It was a distorted face, with wide-staring eyes, and open mouth. A dead man!

He was hanging from a branch above the trail.
• Another victim of the Night Legion...

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by Fran Striker

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THE LONE RANGER

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I

THE STAMPEDE

Sunlight was dying over the prairie, and so was the wind; but sand still sifted through the purpling sage, with harsh, dry whisperings. Sand blew up in little flurries from the desert floor, and drifted about the hoofs of the gaunt, gray horse as he swung his masked rider forward, stride after weary stride, through the growing dusk. In every swaying, dusty line, both man and mount showed evidence of the long, hard trail behind them.

But hard trails were not new to this mystery rider, whose black half-mask and silver mounted forty-fives were already famous throughout the lawless, pioneer West. Figuring in countless tales of daring, they stood always for justice to the criminal and timely aid to the distressed. They stood, in short, for the Lone Ranger, that nameless hero of almost legendary skill with rope, gun and horse, whose sudden appearance on the scene of lawlessness and danger was always followed by the rescue of the unfortunate and the just punishment of guilty persons. No one knew from whence he appeared or whither he afterwards disappeared,—no one except possibly the half-breed Indian, Tonto, the masked man's only close friend and frequent companion. And Tonto never talked.

The long friendship between him and the Lone Ranger went deeper than words, and permitted no questioning by others.

On the present trail, not even Tonto accompanied the masked rider. Only the weary gray gelding shared his

toil, along with the dangers and discomforts that still beset it.

"Quit dreaming, Pony-hoss!"

The rider straightened in his saddle and peered ahead into the spreading shadow cast by a low butte upon the trail. "If my guess is good," he went on, addressing the gray's twitching ears, "we're due for a little fun. Those men we're following can't be very far ahead,—might be just the other side of that swaybacked butte. Looks as if they're heading straight for Windy Creek after looting Bar Seven Ranch. And likely the Windy Creek Bank will be missing a lot of money tomorrow unless—"

WHACK!

The speaker's body jerked, as if struck by an invisible fist, and in the same second his horse lurched, knees crumpling, to roll heavily on the sand.

The rider sprawled motionless. His hat rolled for a few feet, helped by the wind, and settled right side up, to show a small, black hole through the dented crown. For a moment there was no sound anywhere, except the rustling of sand particles through dry sage brush. Then the horse's ears twitched slowly, back and forth, the man's body relaxed, rolled over, and a soft but hearty laugh seemed to bubble up from the dusty ground.

"Pony-hoss, you sure have got that little old tumbling trick down fine,—one kick in the ribs, and down you go like a shot rabbit! All the same, that slug parted my hair just as slick as you please. And it ruined twenty dollars worth of Stetson's best. Good shooting, too, considering that it's almost dark."

Rolling quickly to his still motionless horse, the rider tugged a heavy-calibred, short-barrelled carbine from the saddle-boot, and carefully blew the dust from its lock. Then, crouching, he ran swiftly toward a low rise of ground. Half way up he halted, listening, then straightened deliberately, with a snort of disgust.

From the black shadow of the butte came a sudden thudding of hoofs, which faded quickly into the distance.

"Well, if they haven't gone and left us all alone! And with night coming on, too! That hurts my feelings!" A grin spread over the Lone Ranger's face, showing a flash of white teeth through the gathering twilight. "How about you, Pony-hoss?" he called.

The gray rolled over, struggled to his feet, and after shaking a small avalanche of sand from flank and neck, trotted to where his rider stood. A moment later they were moving again over the prairie, man and mount swinging to one long rhythm, at the mile-eating lope of the open range.

Little by little the crescent of a new moon lifted above the starkly silhouetted buttes. The desert paled, silvered, changed gradually into a shimmering sea of mist and creeping shadows. The rider seemed to loom taller and broader in the uncertain light, a ghostly giant on a great, gray horse that leaped into cavernous shadows and out again into pools of rippling moonlight, following an all but invisible track through an unearthly landscape.

But there was reality enough in the weariness that shortened the gray's stride and slowed his laboring muscles. And, knowing this, the Lone Ranger had no eye for moonlight or desert scenery. His horse might carry him another mile, or another two miles, at this pace, but then he would be done. Meanwhile the fresher animals ahead were lengthening their lead,—or would be if their riders still feared pursuit.

If they did not, that is, if they still thought their pursuer hurt or afoot, after that shot from ambush, miles back on the trail, then they would still head for Windy Creek, and take their time.

With that thought, the Lone Ranger pulled the panting gray to a walk. No hurry now, unless those dry-gulchers had seen him since moonrise, and were still

hightailing for parts unknown. If not, they'd be bound to stop sometime for a rest and a snack of cold grub, probably at the next spring, if they knew where to find it.

Meantime, the gray was nearly used up. He had been travelling since early morning, with no rest, while the raiders had looted fresh mounts from the Bar Seven. Thoughtfully, his rider pulled up, slid to the ground and loosened the saddle-girth. With expert hands, he fingered hocks, knees and fetlocks, whistling softly whenever a slight swelling told him of stiffening joints. Straightening his back at last, he ran a rough, caressing hand over the gray's drooping ears and neck.

"You've done your best, Partner, and I am grateful to you. We'll walk along together for a while now; and then,—we'll see."

The sign which the Lone Ranger followed was clear enough, even by moonlight, for the three raiders ahead had taken no pains to hide their track. There was little wind to drift the sand, and the marks of shod hoofs were more sharply defined, with each mile of progress. The lone hunter's eyes seldom dropped now to the trail at his feet. They searched always ahead, watching the shadows of every sage and greasewood clump, the dark mouths of every draw and gulch, the more distant outlines of three sand-scoured buttes that rose, one above the other, from the prairie level. He knew that he might follow the trail for hours, or—he might not! At any moment a rifle might spit yellow flame and a leaden pill with his name on it. That was almost certain, if the outlaws had enough sense to watch their back-trail, though with their one pursuer supposed to be afoot or dead, they might not think it worth while.

Less than a mile ahead was a spring, hidden, to be sure, in a little blind canyon behind the lowest butte. But probably some one of the raiders knew it, too; and that was where they would stop, if at all. Their horses, to

judge by the tracks, had been moving faster from here on, and that looked as if they'd been pushed to reach the spring in a hurry. Their riders could use a drink too.

"Wild Horse Spring—and it's the only all-year-round water in twenty square miles! As I remember, there's a valley spreading out from that little blind canyon, with some cotton-woods and a lot of right good feed in it. Always used to be a herd of wild horses hanging around there, until the hunters caught too many of them, and the rest cleared out. But lately there's been talk of another herd using the springs. I wonder now,—"

The Lone Ranger's thoughts travelled far and wide, into past and future, as they pleased. But his eyes and ears were very much in the present, and his splendid nerves and muscles were alert to act upon the slightest warning of his senses.

Suddenly the gray's head went up. He stopped short, quivering, with ears pricked forward, and a long breath whistled through his nostrils. His rider had dropped to the ground and appeared to listen; tensely, with one ear to the earth. Moments passed without further sound or movement. Then, with one lithe motion, the Lone Ranger swung up into the saddle.

"Stamped! The buffalo herd, and coming our way! We're moving out, pronto, and here's just hoping we make it to those high buttes in time!"

A low, rolling thunder began to be heard, even from a rider's height above the ground,—a thunder that grew steadily, in ominous volume, till the desert trembled with it. It drowned out the beat of the gray's frantic hoofs, as he put all his depleted strength into a last, desperate dash.

THE KING OF WILD HORSE VALLEY

A narrow valley wound, like a bright, green serpent between sand-sculptured buttes,—a broad skein of verdant life, dropped from the Sky-God's hand (perhaps by accident) among broken sandstone hills. For there was life in the little valley, teeming life of many kinds, such as is always found where water touches the desert with her quickening magic.

A line of cottonwoods, interspersed with close willow growth, ran through the center of the green valley, marking the course of a small creek, which now brimmed full, fed by April's last tribute of melted snows. For Spring flooded the length and breadth of Wild Horse Valley. Spring tingled in the nostrils of gawky, yearling colts, as they flung their heels to the blue sky, or more often at each other's ribs. It tingled in the throats of feathered songsters in the cotton-woods, and even in the muddy toes of an old, gray badger, who was digging himself a new burrow above high-water mark.

Suddenly the badger stopped work, backing out of his earthly entrance with ludicrous haste, and shook the dirt out of his ears. Whirling about, he pointed eyes, ears and snout straight at a certain thick clump of willows. The willows swayed, then parted, to show the head and anxious ears of a tall, white mare. The badger grunted his disgust, sneezed, and returned to his digging.

The white mare pushed her way completely through the willows, after making sure that no creature more dangerous than the badger lurked within sight or smell,

and walked quickly to the creek where she drank as if quenching a long thirst. Then, turning, she trotted back to the willow clump. Her anxiety was evident, but the object of it was apparent only as a small, damp, sun-dappled colt lying in a little hollow between the willow roots. After making sure that her new-born infant was just as she had left it, she next proceeded to the first duty of all animal mothers; that is, she gave her baby a complete washing!

This process took about an hour, after which the mare emerged again into the sunlight and began cropping the new spring grass with quick, nervous bites. Though hungry, she did not feed for long before returning to nuzzle her foal, to sniff the air about the willow nest, and to look and listen anxiously. For although in many ways Wild Horse Valley was the paradise that it seemed, she had reason to know of certain sneaking coyotes and lone gray timber-wolves, not to forget that tawny murderer, the lean cougar of the hills,—all of whom preferred baby horseflesh to any other delicacy.

On the white mare's third return to his hiding place, the colt wobbled suddenly to his feet, much in the way that a boy struggles for the first time to balance himself on stilts. Indeed, there seemed at first small likelihood that the little gray body with its oversized head could stay upright on those impossibly long and shaky legs for more than an instant. However, the colt not only stood, but made a few rocking steps to his mother's side, and then and there sought out his first meal with the assurance of an old customer.

On the second day of his life, the colt emerged from the willow clump into brilliant sunlight, felt the springing, green sod under his tiny hoofs, and, standing by his parent's side, looked out upon the lush, green expanse of his future kingdom. Seen now in the full sunshine, the dapplings upon his small rump and flanks

were no trick of mere light and shade. They were as clear as any that are painted on a wooded hobby-horse, only ever so much prettier, like the sun-splashed shadows in his birthplace among the willow-roots. The wise college professors who make a study of such things, would have explained that Nature had painted the colt with spots like those of the fawn or the leopard, so that he could hide easily in any leafy covert. As he grew to maturity, the colt's sleek hide would lose these dark dapplings; he would glisten like burnished silver in the sunlight. He was one of those rare freaks among the wild horse tribe—the perfect silver-white—, harking back through the centuries to those fleet, priceless mounts of the old Arabian kings.

But little Silver (for so we shall call him) thought of nothing but the present moment, and not a great deal about that. He was supremely content, in his coltish mind, with the thrilling world that lay immediately about him. His mother's presence meant protection, and food whenever he wanted it, which was often because his appetite was immense compared with his size. A sage hen rising on noisy wings from the tall grass at his feet, a coyote slinking into the cotton-woods with a yap of defiance, the yelp of a hunting eagle high overhead,—any of these sights or sounds would set the colt's little ears alert, and his heart to pounding with pleasant excitement. Later he would learn the joy of long gallops with the wild horse herd, when they raced for the sheer joy of it, and once in his fifth year he would know the terror of a long, weary flight from human hunters among the thirsty buttes.

But for the first few years of his life, young Silver met experiences no different from those of any colt born in Wild Horse Valley. Four times the creek filled to overflowing with the melting of the winter snows; four times it dried up, and the valley grass turned brown

under August heat, so that the horse herds left it for the juicier feed that carpeted certain shady draws high up in the distant foothills. Four years added weight of bone and sinew to the tall, fleet colt with the white mane and glistening, silver hide, before he met the challenge of a great danger. Four years of peace for the wild herds came and went, and then the horse hunters returned.

The hunters were a small band of Sioux Indians, and they planned to capture only a few select prizes out of the several herds that used the valley. But to do this they must make escape impossible for all. They set about it cleverly. For days on end they blocked both exits from the high-walled valley, and rode whooping up and down the nearly dry creek-bed. Thus they kept their quarry from the few waterholes left from the summer's drouth, and forced every horse through sheer thirst to seek the one place his instinct taught him to avoid,—the little blind canyon that concealed Wild Horse Spring.

There the Sioux trapped bunch after bunch of thirst-crazed animals, colts, mares and stallions alike. A rawhide lariat stretched across the canyon's narrow opening and backed by howling riders made an effective pen in which any horse could be roped and taken at the hunters' pleasure.

But never did the silver stallion appear among the captives. He was often sighted, for the valley was of no great extent; but he never approached the canyon trap, and always he kept with him a few of the hardest mustangs who followed his leading. How they kept alive during those thirsty days can only be guessed. They snatched mouthfuls of dewy grass here and there when the chase slackened between dark and dawn. Probably they managed to lick some moisture out of hidden and nearly dry waterholes, unknown to the hunters. But they grew thin with constant running and loss of sleep.

The final escape of this little band of unconquerables

was owing more to the courage of their silver leader than to carelessness on the part of the hunters. At the valley's upper entrance, a deep, narrow gulch stretched its precipitous walls for a hundred yards west of the narrow, guarded pass which led to freedom and the wooded foothills. At no point did the lips of this gaping cleft approach each other nearer than twenty feet. The gulch, in short, was as perfect an obstacle to escape as any horse hunter could desire. At least, so the red Sioux believed. Even supposing that some among the wild herds might be rash enough to attempt such a mad leap, the presence of the Indian guard at the nearby pass should be enough to keep them away. So reasoned the hunters, little guessing the amazing daring and intelligence of the silver stud.

The days of desperate search for a way of escape had proved only too well that both the broad southern entrance and the narrow pass to the north were blocked by red riders, as was likewise every possible trail up the sheer hillsides which rimmed the length and breadth of Wild Horse Valley. There remained only the deep gulch—a poor chance perhaps, but the last that remained—and Silver knew it. He sensed also, intuitively (for a horse does not reason round-about like a man) that the attempt must be made quickly if at all. The little band of fugitives were beginning to lose strength, to be slower in running, more careless in hiding from the never-ending chase. Soon there would be few left with strength to make any leap—and the deep gulch was all of twenty feet from rim to rim.

It was in the dark hours between midnight and dawn that Silver rounded up his little herd. There were no colts under two years old, no old mares, no cripples or weaklings, but all young, swift mares and stallions making up the number of twenty-odd. Ordinarily Silver led his band, but now he drove them, with quick, stern

signals—a push of the shoulder, a nip at a laggard's flank, a snorted warning—and none were disobeyed. Almost without sound the little herd approached the valley's northern end. They did not hurry, for the sound of running hoofs would carry to red hunters, but they travelled steadily, a troop of silent shadows.

Obedient to a warning whistle, they halted behind a thin screen of cotton-woods, not two hundred yards from the deep gulch, and opposite its narrowest part, where their last bid for freedom must succeed or fail. They waited, thirsty, weary, half-starved, yet sensing the approach of desperate action in their leader's tense vigilance,—waited until the first pale light of dawn made visible the rough, open ground in front. And then the silver stallion showed once for all the quality of his leadership.

Unlike a human chieftain, he could not explain to his following the reasons for his acts, or the part which they must play,—not even what he was about to attempt. But he could rouse them by bite and kick and snorted command, and force them into a sudden, mad stampede. Once they had started, Silver plunged to the lead, and raced, with streaming tail and mane, straight for the great leap. The little herd strung out behind him, but nothing could stop them now.

The black mouth of the gulch gaped ahead of them. Thirty yards, twenty yards, ten yards remained between it and the silver leader. Another bound, and the stallion's mighty muscles bunched for the final effort. If one hoof should slip now—

But the great, glistening body rose, soared through the air, struck with gripping fore-hoofs the farther ledge. Another bounding stride, and the last barrier to freedom lay yards behind. Then the others followed, leaping as if winged by terror, knowing that a slip meant broken limbs and death. The two rims of the gulch crumbled

under the avalanche of hoofs. Dust arose in a gray cloud; and then, suddenly, it was over. All but four of the gallant little band fled, wild-eyed and sweat streaked but safe, from the valley prison which had been their birthplace and their home.

A day's hard travel remained between them and the sheltering foothills, another day of toil and bitter thirst; but at the end lay water and green grass and shade from the parching sun. Good feed might be scantier there than in the home valley, for the sheltered draws were few, and the elk and the black-tailed deer shared what pasturage there was with the antelope. But there at least was safety from human enemies, and from Thirst, the arch-enemy of the desert herds.

For two years Silver ruled his wild band, and held to the upland refuge, for now there were none to dispute his leadership. In that period the original twenty attracted many times their number of stragglers from the scattered herds of Wild Horse Valley, and the problem of finding enough pasture in the sparsely watered hills grew ever more acute. In the second summer of their exile an unusually long drouth settled the matter definitely. The grass not yet eaten in the shady draws dried up; the springs became mere damp hollows, dug up by pawing hoofs; the leaves of the cotton-wood turned yellow and dropped to the earth before their time. And Silver's herd, remembering the never-failing water of Wild Horse Spring, began their migration. The red Sioux hunters might come again, or they might not, but water and feed must be had, whatever the risk.

The distance from the hills to the valley had been covered in a single day by Silver's band of diehards, two years before; but now there were young colts, and a larger, slower herd, so that many more hours were consumed. The start had been made at dawn but a crescent moon had risen and begun to set before the

broad southern entrance to Wild Horse Valley came in sight. Silver, charged with the care of so large a herd, had circled to avoid the narrow, northern pass.

But this very maneuver, as it chanced, brought them all but to face with deadly peril.

The slowly ambling herd had arrived within half a mile of a wedge-shaped butte that marked the valley entrance, when a low thunder seemed to tremble on the distant horizon. Rising and falling in volume, not loud or startling as yet, it was more ominous than any desert storm to one who knew its meaning. And Silver knew, perhaps by that strange guardian instinct of wild creatures, beside which man's reason is a puny thing. Whirling to the rear of his straggling troop, he became suddenly a creature of fury and lightning-terrible action. Biting, plunging, squealing, with flying hoofs, he drove his scattered charges into a compact body, and then forward, faster and faster, racing for the shelter of the wedge-shaped butte. Here was no time for the gentle urging of the weak and lame. If a colt dropped out, if an exhausted mare stumbled and fell, the many must not slow down for the straggler in this race with death.

For the buffalo herd was sweeping toward Wild Horse Valley in full stampede, and to get there first was the only hope of life for the wild horse band,—and that providing only no part of the stampede should enter the valley itself.

So swift had been the action of the silver stallion that the last of his charges rounded the butte and fled up the level valley with moments to spare. But their leader's work was not done. As yet there was safety for none unless the edge of the great stampede could be turned. Otherwise, split off by the wedge-shaped butte, a part of it would jam into Wild Horse Valley, and sweep through its lower reaches unchecked.

Like a great silver projectile, the stallion hurled

himself at the approaching wall of maddened bison, then turned, and raced along its edge, screaming, striking, charging, half a ton to fiend incarnate, fighting to turn the living avalanche from its course.

And, degree by degree, it turned. Only its extreme edge collided with the broken sandstone heaped at the butte's sharp base. Only a dozen struggling, dust-hidden forms remained there, split off from the great herd that thundered past. And several of them would never rise again.

The dust-cloud thinned, and from the huddle at the butte's foot a great bull heaved to his feet. Then three or four cows and a young bull staggered free. For a moment, all stood together, bewildered, blinking, gasping, lolling dry, protruding tongues. Then, without warning, the older bull bellowed and charged with lowered head at a stumbling blood-streaked silver horse that had just that moment struggled from the ground.

III

MAN AND HORSE

The stallion was doomed—barring a miracle. The bull's tremendous head swept low with its black horns, scimitar-sharp, curving out from the shaggy front. A ton of muscled murder drove that armored forehead straight at the silver flank.

But with the thud of contact came a sharper, whiplike report; and the giant bull lay kicking, while a thin, dark stream trickled from his nostrils into the earth.

The silver horse lay close by. A spasmodic heave of his flank showed by how little the bull's deadly charge had missed crushing out life and breath together. About both bodies the dust-cloud settled quietly.

For a long moment nothing happened, nothing stirred under the moonlight. Then the few remaining buffalo snorted and lumbered off, like great, woolly dogs in a hurry. Another danger had penetrated their thick skulls, a new odor tingled in the air, as the smoke of burned gunpowder drifted from the shadow of the butte.

"If ever a fighting horse deserved to live, he's that Silver!"

With the softly drawled words, the Lone Ranger stepped out of the shadows, carbine in hand, and walked over to the station who still lay breathing in heavy gasps. He stooped, fingers moving gently, expertly, over the many gashes and bruises on the beast's dusty coat. Seizing an outstretched foreleg, he turned the body over, pressed battered ribs, touched a cut stifle, a bleeding hip, a torn shoulder.

"Cut up, winded, knocked cold,—but you'll do, Old Timer! Glad I stopped that bull first shot. Right now what you need is a drink, and drink you're going to have!"

He whistled three notes, like a bird-call, whereupon a saddled gray horse moved out of the butte's shadow and ambled forward with ears pricked. A large canteen tied to the saddle-bow gave a faint, sloshing sound as the Lone Ranger removed it.

"I reckon when a hoss is knocked out he needs just what a man would, to bring him around." The rider chuckled as he raised the stallion's head against his knee and forced the canteen's nozzle between helpless jaws. "Here! Take it! There, that's better!"

A shudder ran through the stallion's frame, as the first few drops of water touched his parched throat. After that he swallowed eagerly. With the canteen empty at last, the Lone Ranger stood up to watch the effect of his rough nursing.

For five long minutes the horse did not move, except to breathe; but at the end of that time his breathing had steadied and become deeper. Suddenly one of the sprawled legs drew up, then all the rest together. The dusty head lifted, the neck arched, the mighty shoulders raised themselves on the trembling fore-legs; but the hindquarters seemed weighted to the ground. the stallion's bloodshot eye rolled toward the tall figure of his benefactor,—was it a mute plea for help? Certainly fear could find small room in the beast's gallant heart; but help he clearly needed.

The Lone Ranger stepped quickly, grasped the white tail at its root, and with every steel-banded muscle straining, heaved upward. The stallion stood—limbs sprawled stiffly, head hanging, breath sobbing again through quivering nostrils. Still he stood. And, minute by minute his strength returned, as his great heart sent

new life surging through the stiffened muscles.

The Ranger's hand moved firmly, caressingly, over the wild horse's neck, down over the shapely forelegs, massaging back the stagnant circulation, rubbing away the ache of weariness. And his voice ran up and down, as soothingly as his hands, in quite "horse-talk," where not the words but the tones are understood. The wild look left the stallion's eye, the trembling limbs steadied, the drooping head came up. A few trial steps stood the test. Then the great horse broke into a stumbling trot, disregarding wounds and weakness, as he circled his strange human friend.

For a moment the Lone Ranger stood watching thoughtfully. "You, Silver," he murmured, "if I didn't have other business right now, I should like to know you better! Maybe some day,—"

He broke off, and, swinging aboard the gray pony, took up the outlaws' trail that led to Wild Horse Spring.

The line of alders and cotton-woods bordering the valley's central stream-bed began not far from the first guardian butte; and from then on both horse and man were hidden in its leafy shadows. They moved steadily but with care, so that only the keenest ears could have marked their passing within yards. The moon sank lower, and its shadow patterns had lengthened considerably before the rider pulled rein opposite a narrow gap in the Valley wall. Impatiently the gray horse stamped, tugging at his bit, but the Ranger's hand only tightened.

"Quiet, Pony!" he whispered. "I know you smell water,—Wild Horse Spring's just up at the head of that little canyon. But some friends of ours are hanging around there too, with their six guns pointed this way. And they *might* be spooky enough to shoot them off!" Now *I* might try crawling up on them, Indian style—

"Hold on! There they come now!"

Out of the box canyon's dark mouth pushed three riders in single file, heading straight for the cotton-woods whose blackness concealed the Lone Ranger and his gray mount. Their horses trotted easily, refreshed by water and a short rest. The riders themselves appeared unsuspecting of danger. But within a space of moments their course would bring them face to face with the watcher of the shadows.

Silently the Lone Ranger slid to ground, on the far side of his horse, and in the same motion drew the carbine from its saddle-boot. Across the saddle-tree the black gun-barrel steadied to aim as the leading outlaw entered the shadow-line.

One yard, two yards he approached, then halted, twisting half around in his saddle as the other two closed up. To judge by his growl, the brief stop at the Spring had not sweetened his temper.

"Come on! We ain't got all night if we're goin' to hit Windy Creek before daylight. Trail starts the other side of these cotton-woods,—"

"Put them up, boys! All three of you!"

Softly spoken, the command yet cracked like a whip.

The lead horse reared, a man grunted, another snarled surprise. Then nothing stirred while a watch might tick twenty. Had there been light to see by, raised hands and sullen faces might have signalled surrender; but actually in the black shadows the returning wits of three desperate men brought other results.

Darkness was split four ways by flame and thunder. Brush crashed under plunging hoofs. A single groan was drowned by hoarse shouting, as three riders tore out of the trees, one of them reeling in his saddle.

Beneath the cotton-woods, the Lone Ranger stood, with head drooping, over the dim shape of a fallen horse. Drawing a long, sobbing breath, he whispered, brokenly,—

"Couldn't help it. Old Timer! I could have emptied three saddles, out there in the moonlight,—one bullet apiece, and they wouldn't have had a chance. But I am not built that way. So you and I had to take the chance, and you lost, Pony!"

Very gently he removed saddle and bridle from the gray body and, shouldering them, started walking toward the little canyon. Once, at the edge of the woods, he stopped and looked back.

"So long, Old Timer!" he whispered. "And happy pastures!"

Owing to summer drouth, the canyon floor was as dry as Wild Horse Valley for most of its length. Tufts of dead buffalo grass covered it sparsely, and a few straggling alders marked the dry arroyo which cut through its center. But a hundred yards in, the sandstone walls made a sharp turn and came to an end. The pocket thus formed was damply cool, edged with the green of grass and bushes, wherever broken rocks from the cliff side protected them from trampling hoofs. For here bubbled from a sandstone basin the never failing water of Wild Horse Spring. About the pool the loose soil was deeply cut by hoof-marks, but so strong was the flow of crystal water that no debris had ever clogged its source. For years — perhaps for centuries — wild things had come and drunk of the overflow, while the desert sand had drunk up what they left. But the source itself never failed.

All this the Lone Ranger remembered, having come here years before with Tonto on a horse-hunt,—the hunt that had brought the Ranger a slim, gray, two-year-old colt. Now that colt was linked with later memories of faithful companionship on long, hard trails, and a gray, stiffening form back there in the cotton-woods.

But urgent needs drove out unhappy thoughts. Water, then sleep, were prime necessities. To-morrow would bring food—whatever might fall to the hunter's

bullet—and some plan for getting out of Wild Horse Valley, either mounted or afoot. The outlaws must go scot-free, this time at any rate, except for the man who had been nicked by the Lone Ranger's fire. Windy Creek Bank must take its own chances with them now.

Rounding the little canyon's turn, the Lone Ranger lost no time in slacking his long thirst and dipping head and hands into the cold, sweet water of the pool. No bitter alkalai tainted Wild Horse Spring, as it did most of the water holes of the desert country. But for all its refreshing effect, fatigue weighed heavily on the rider's limbs. After a second drink of cold water, he climbed to a little shelf in the canyon wall, just where it turned, and there unrolled his blanket. The heavy stock-saddle had been his pillow for most of his years since boyhood; blanket and tarpaulin his only shelter for most of his nights. Within three minutes he was sleeping as soundly as any wild creature of the plains; that is to say, while mind and muscles slept, his senses were alert for any signal carried by air or earth-tremor and his nerves attuned for instant waking, should the signal come.

It was well after dawn when the sleeper awoke and raised himself on an elbow, to peer down the shadowed gut of Wild Horse Canyon, but the sun was not yet visible from his sheltered niche. The little shelf was still in semi-darkness. Nevertheless the Lone Ranger, after that first movement, "froze" to perfect stillness—a trick used by all hunters when they wish to be invisible. Only the trained human eye can spy out living objects where there is no motion; and only the Ranger's lips moved, to quirk themselves in a smile.

Up the little canyon blew a gentle morning breeze, and cat-footing after it came the great silver stallion with the wild horse herd strung out behind him.

The Lone Ranger's smile grew thoughtful. "Crazy for a drink, all of them," he whispered to himself. "And

they're likely to kill themselves with too much water after waiting so long. That is, unless they're stopped." Grinning like a bad boy, he untied his coiled horsehair lariat from the saddle under his hand, and quietly spread a loop, as the horse herd approached the spring unconscious of any human presence.

Thirsty as he was, the big stallion scarcely wet his muzzle before stepping back behind the milling colts and mares. As their guardian, he placed was now at their rear, to watch at the canyon's bend for possible trespassers; and this brought him directly under that narrow shelf where surprise lay in wait—in the shape of his erstwhile rescuer and a ready lariat.

The latter delayed long enough for the jostling herd to gulp a few saving mouthfuls of spring water. Then, silently as a striking snake, the horsehair loop shot out and down. A wild snort, a leap, a mad, brief struggle, a sudden torrent of flying bodies and streaming tails,—each picture followed another with the rapidity of films flashed upon a screen. And even while the black noose tightened about the stallion's throat, the little rock-walled theater was emptied of all but two actors, the Lone Ranger and his silver captive.

Under ordinary conditions, no single lariat could have held the big stallion. But he was weakened by thirst and loss of blood, not to mention the terrific pounding he had taken in the battle under the butte, six hours before. Besides, the Ranger's rope of braided horsehair was incredibly strong, for all its slenderness. Perhaps, too, the fact that his herd escaped safely robbed their weary leader of some of his fighting fury.

At any rate, few moments passed before the silver horse stood quiet, like a tethered colt, though still atremble with nervous anger. Noting this, the Lone Ranger stopped only to wedge his saddle more firmly in a cleft of rock before slipping to the canyon floor.

"Now, you Silver," he warned, "if you stay put for a few minutes, I'll give you a real drink; but if you break loose, you'll go dry for a long, long time!"

He did not make the mistake of supposing that first acquaintance with a wild horse, even under the circumstances of a few hours before when he saved the great Silver's life, had driven out the fear that all wild creatures have of Man. At best one first good impression had been made; and it must be followed by a process of gentle mastery before the stallion would be in any sense tamed. In this process, thirst was the Lone Ranger's powerful ally. The stallion was suffering, longing for water, in every nerve and fibre of his tired body; and if Man brought water to heal, refresh and cool the thirsting beast, their acquaintance might turn the corner of friendship and become trust. This, at least, was the Ranger's intention. Of course, to slap saddle and bridle onto a terrified beast, and to ride that beast to exhausted surrender, would have been easy enough; but the result would have been a defeated, treacherous animal, who obeyed because he must and watched only for a chance to rebel. Most roughly broken cow-ponies were such animals; and the Lone Ranger wanted none of them. In the gray gelding he had lost a friend, tried and trusted, and in the silver stallion he now sought another friend.

An hour of patient attempt brought its reward, and the wild stallion drank finally a few mouthfuls of water from the Ranger's deep-crowned sombrero, whose bullet-pierced felt had been plugged with cotton-wood bark. After that matters progressed rapidly. Many hafuls of cold water were gulped thirstily; many others were splashed gently over the cuts and bruises which marred the silver coat. Then bunches of moistened grass, and at last two quarts of grain from the Ranger's saddle bags, replaced water in the familiar hat and were

munched hungrily. Silver no longer strained against the horsehair noose, no longer flinched from the strong hands that rubbed his neck and withers. But now his real education began.

The heavy saddle was brought and given him to sniff, along with the bridle, both redolent with the sweat of man and horse. The saddle blanket was eased softly onto the stallion's quivering back, then the saddle with stirrups caught up lest they should swing and startle him. The girth was cinched, not tight at first; the bit and bridle (most difficult of all) were slipped into place after much persuasion and a brief struggle. Last of all, the lariat's loose end was made fast to a forefoot just below the fetlock and led over the saddle-horn so that the foot was raised some inches from the ground. The lariat's central bight, or loop, was fixed to a stout bush; and the great horse stood on three legs, a disgusted but no longer furious captive.

The Lone Ranger stood back some paces and looked happily at his handiwork. "Silver," he laughed, "do you know I haven't had a bit of breakfast, and my belt buckle is knocking against my backbone,—all due to my playing nurse to a bronc who thinks I've played a mean trick on him. Well, here's where I leave you to your happy thoughts, if any, and collect some grub for myself!

Half an hour later he was back at the spring with a fat sage hen that his bullet had neatly beheaded. A tiny sagebrush fire roasted the skinned bird and boiled coffee in jig time. A satisfying if simple meal was finished, and more water was brought in the battered sombrero to the silver horse. After that a last scraping of grain from the saddle-bags restored still further the stallion's fast-returning energy, and the hobbling rope was transferred to his other foreleg.

"Time we should be moving on, Silver. Let's see how you take to carrying weight. Easy, now! I'm no

catamount trying to claw you . . . There, now— steady's the word! Three legs are better than two, anyhow. Let's see what the Valley looks like outside this pocket canyon."

With the lariat's slack in one hand and reins in the other, the Lone Ranger urged his nervous mount down the canyon's gut. Bucking was made impossible by the roped-up foreleg; therefore all possibility of a fight between rider and horse was avoided. Firmly but gently the fact of his helplessness was impressed on the wild stud.

Progress down the little canyon was neither straight nor easy. Under the impulse of his rider's heels, the stallion limped forward, reared, went forward again, and ended by hobbling aimlessly here and there. Soon, however, he became aware of a steady pressure on neck and mouth, where rein and bit made their control felt. Before he knew what was happening, the great beast, yielding to that firm guidance, came out of his aimless wandering and laid a more or less straight course for the valley.

Once arrived there, the Ranger leaned quickly from his saddle and jerked free the slip-knot which gripped the suspended forefoot.

"Now, Silver Boy," he murmured, "If you feel like doing a little fancy bucking, this is your chance!"

Beneath him the great body quivered, muscles bunching like tightened springs. Then, like a living projectile, it shot forward.

But the power so swiftly unleashed was not spent in any attempt to unseat the rider. Silver, given free rein and the use of all four legs, thought only of speed. He was still a good deal frightened by the strangeness of bit and bridle, and the feeling of a rider's weight was still terribly upsetting. They did not make him angry now, but they did make him want to run away.

No free, wild horse of the plains had ever matched Silver's speed, and none could have matched it now, even without the handicap of a rider's weight. Under those driving legs the Valley floor seemed to pour like yellow flood-water. Only once before had such running been known in Wild Horse Valley,—the time when a certain silver colt had led his band of die-hards over the great leap that meant freedom from the Sioux horse-hunters. Surefooted now as then, he sailed over rocky out-crop or dry arroyo without breaking the swift rhythm of his stride; and the Lone Ranger, swaying easily to that rhythm, grinned with approval. Never had he (or any one he knew) possessed such a horse as this!

IV

DEATH AND DYNAMITE

A double wheel track, cut into the prairie soil by a heavily loaded wagon, angled obliquely toward the long, straight line of raw earth that marked the new railroad,—the first railroad ever laid across the great American Desert. Coming out of nowhere in particular and heading directly for the big construction camp at the end of the rails, a wagon track could mean only one thing; buffalo hunters hauling their day's take of meat to hungry laborers on the steel road. The wheel tracks were fresh, which meant that they marked the shortest route to camp; so the Lone Ranger followed them.

He was riding the silver stallion, whose wounds were now nearly healed, and who had recovered every bit of his magnificent strength,—strength he had spent so recklessly in the battle at the Butte, to save his herd. Like all men who have lived most of their life in the saddle, the Lone Ranger rode as if he were a part of his horse, or his horse were a part of his own body; but there was already a deeper unity between the man and his mount. Both of them were really untamed creatures, more akin to the wild life of butte and prairie than to the crowded humanity of towns and their tame cattle. The reason was, of course, that while the Lone Ranger, like his silver horse, recognized certain friendships and certain duties from time to time, neither man nor beast felt any *need to depend* on any other creature. Finding others to be weaker, slower, less clever; they had both learned to trust in no help but their own strength, wits, speed and fighting heart. They had learned, too, that it is as dangerous to ignore as it is to fear a possible enemy.

Therefore, when a light breeze brought the first sharp scent of wood-smoke to their nostrils, both horse and rider tensed instantly at the warning! Smoke, in that wild country and in those wild days when the first railroad was being pushed through the American Desert,—smoke of any kind usually meant an enemy nearby. That enemy might be a raiding party of Sioux warriors, or a camp of white outlaws, or a lone hunter either white or red. In any case it paid to take no chances even within sight of a railroad camp where the laborers toiled with rifles close at hand!

Knowing this, the Lone Ranger turned to investigate the fire whose smoke had aroused his suspicion. A whisper, a touch on Silver's rein, sent the half-wild stallion drifting up-wind toward a patch of dark jack-pines. The trees swallowed up horse and rider just as the setting sun disappeared behind their black tops. Dismounting, the Lone Ranger picked a careful path among low branches and brittle, dry twigs. Silver followed on soundless hoofs, his bridle-rein looped over his master's left shoulder.

Coming suddenly on a little clearing in the pine grove, they halted, the masked man's right hand flashing to the silver-mounted gun-butt on his thigh.

"Put them up in a hurry," he called.

From a camp-fire ten paces away, a figure straightened up, both its hands reaching for the sky. And so it stood, back turned to the Ranger's gun, motionless while a full minute dragged by. Then a quiet but hearty laugh sounded from the woods. The Indian turned about grinning his welcome, and the black six-gun went back into its holster.

"Too bad to scare you that way, Tonto." The Lone Ranger chuckled again. "But your back looked just too tempting!"

The half-breed's face lost its grin, as he bent down over a boiling pot above the fire. His hair, worn in two heavy braids, Indian style, hung down in front of his buckskin shirt. His trousers were likewise of fringed buckskin, and his soft moccasins bright with colored beads but his expression as he stirred the pot with a broken twig was as solemnly concentrated as that of a professor.

Finally Tonto shrugged his shoulders and grunted. "No scared. But how come you pussyfoot through woods like catamount? And where's gray horse?"

The Lone Ranger stepped forward into the firelight, keeping a quieting hand on Silver's neck.

"We had a little run-in with some wild boys, back in Wild Horse Valley, and the gray didn't have any luck." The Ranger sighed. "That gray and I followed the same trails for eight years!"

Tonto digested the information in silence while he stirred the pot. "How you ketch that Silver so quick? Many men see 'um a long way off and want 'um; but no one get 'um before."

Hooking his arm through the big stallion's reins, the Lone Ranger sat on his heels beside the fire and outlined in terse sentences the events leading up to Silver's capture. When he had finished, the halfbreed squatted down opposite and stared at the glowing coals.

"Three men ride into railroad camp two days ago," he said at length. "One got 'um arm tied up. Call 'um Slotkin."

The Lone Ranger looked thoughtful. "Ever seen any of them before?"

"Ugh! See Slotkin two years ago. Call 'um then Gunner Maxim."

"So? Well, I thought there was something familiar about the one I hit back there in the valley. Gunner

Maxim, eh? What has he got up his sleeve now, besides a broken arm?"

Tonto picked up the stick and stirred slowly in the pot for several minutes. Then, squatting down again, he resumed his queer story.

"Me cook 'um medicine for sick boss in railroad camp. Sick man got son, young boss. Maybe so Gunner Maxim get rid of young boss too, pretty quick."

The Lone Ranger rubbed a thoughtful hand over his lean, brown jaw. "You go too fast for me, Tonto," he murmured. "When did the big boss get sick?"

"Two days ago, after Gunner Maxim hit camp."

The Ranger nodded. "Yes, it looks suspicious. Maybe someone poisoned him, and you're thinking that the same 'someone' may want to get the young boss out of the way. But why should anybody want to get those two out of the way? Got any answer to that, Old Smoky-face?"

Tonto removed the boiling pot from the fire. "Man call 'um Glencoe come to camp same day as Gunner Maxim. Him 'nother big boss from East. Go away same day before dark, and Big Boss Walton get sick that night. Look like maybe he die now if this Injun medicine no help 'um."

"Hmmm! So you suspect that this dude Glencoe wants Walton and his boy out of the way, and that Gunner Maxim is in Glencoe's pay. But why?"

"Time for railroad contract gettin' short. Walton lose it if no have luck. Then maybe so Glencoe get 'um."

A dangerous light glinted in the Lone Ranger's eyes as if in imagination he were already sighting over a gun-barrel.

He muttered grimly. "It looks as if that dude, Glencoe, wanted the Waltons' contract and wouldn't stop at anything to get it! Well, it may turn out that you and I— and Silver, here,—will have something to say

about that, Tonto. What do you say? You and I have smelt out a few coyote tracks before now. And we generally got the *coyote* in the end, too."

The half-breed arose without answering and examined the contents of the cooling pot.

"Ugh! We go now. You wait, I get 'um horse."

Two minutes later, Tonto having brought his saddled mustang from a hiding place near the clearing, the two riders ambled off side by side, in the direction of the railroad camp. They arrived in an hour, halting on a little knoll that overlooked the dim city of tents which was the camp.

Most of these makeshift habitations were dark. A few showed lamplight glowing faintly through their canvas walls.

One large, ramshackle affair made of boards and canvas was brightly aglow in the center of the tent city, and from it came sounds of loud merriment mingled with the tinny banging of a piano. A huge sign over the entrance proclaimed it a "BAR AND BILLIARD PALACE." The Lone Ranger and Tonto steered clear of it and headed in another direction, toward a big, white tent pitched at a distance from the main community. Tonto indicated it with a wave of his hand. "Sick boss in there with young boss and white woman call 'um nurse. No white doctor in camp, so young boss call for Tonto. You wait outside two-three minutes."

The half-breed slipped off his mount, letting the reins fall to the ground, and softly entered the tent, carrying his medicine pot. In a moment he was back again accompanied by a bent, white-haired individual dressed in a combination of prospector's and trapper's gear. Approaching the Lone Ranger Tonto grunted "This Old Clem. He take care of silver horse. You come inside now."

"Silver hoss!—" The old fellow hobbled closer,

peering at the great stallion who stamped and laid back his ears, indignant at the presence of so much humanity near and about him. "Say! Be that the same silver stud the Sioux horse hunters chased out of Wild Horse Valley, two years back? It can't be! And yet, if I didn't see him under that saddle, I'd swear it was the same one. Wa-al,—"

"It is the same one," grinned the Lone Ranger, swinging to the ground, "but he isn't more than half broken, so be careful he doesn't get away from you, Clem. Where will I find you and him when I come out of that tent?"

"Gosh almighty! The same one! Stranger, I shure wouldn't want to doubt your word, but,—well, you'll find us over at that other tent you see just beyond this one. Miss Kate, she's the nurse in there trying to keep the old man alive. She lives in that other tent, and I hang out in the little one close by to keep these tough mugs from bothering her. You'll find the horse and me right there when you come."

Tonto had already entered the big tent, and the Ranger followed, treading softly. Inside, the sickroom was lighted dimly by two lanterns, one of them hung by the bed where the half-breed was administering the broth of his brewed herbs to the white-faced, elderly patient. A young woman dressed in white was supporting the invalid's head as he tried to drink from a large tin cup.

A tall young man dressed in flannel shirt, rough trousers, and boots stood by the front of the bed, watching anxiously. Even in that dim light the resemblance of his features and those of the sick man was discernible. He started, and swung around on hearing the Ranger's footstep.

Tonto eased himself back from the bedside and stood erect. "This my good friend," he murmured, addressing

the young man. "Maybe so he be your friend, too."

Young Dave Walton strode forward impulsively, his hand outstretched. "We certainly are going to need friends from now on," he whispered. "Mighty glad you came, stranger."

The Ranger smiled gravely, gripping the boy's hand with steely fingers. "I don't know how I can help you folks," he said softly, "but I'll be mighty glad to try."

Dave beckoned to the young woman by the bedside, and after rearranging the sick man's pillow, she came quickly toward the group near the door.

"This is Miss Kate Stevens, who arrived only to-day to nurse Father. We knew her people back in Kansas. In fact, we bought the large section of their land for the railroad. She's been stopping with friends five hundred miles back East, and was good enough to come when I wired about Father's sickness. You see, there is no doctor available this far West."

The Lone Ranger bowed courteously. "I'm happy to make your acquaintance," he said. "How is your patient doing?" The girl's eyes turned pityingly toward young Dave as she answered, "Not too well, I fear. I'm afraid there is no use hiding the fact that he has been poisoned with arsenic. He has not been able to hold anything on his stomach, not even Tonto's medicine." She laid a hand impulsively on young Dave's arm as tears flashed in her dark eyes. "I am afraid there is no use hoping." At a sound from the sickbed she turned quickly. "I think he is conscious now. You had better come, Dave."

The three moved hurriedly to the bedside, where the elder Walton was struggling to sit up. "David, come here."

For some moments he struggled for control while Miss Stevens tried to support him with pillows.

"David, I know—I am going over the Divide. You

must carry on my work. The contract must be met within the next two weeks. The name of Walton must not stand for failure.

"Don't worry, Dad, I'll carry on. Don't worry. You must take your rest now."

"It will be a long rest very soon. I want to tell you certain men want to stop us from fulfilling the contract on time. They will stop at nothing. I'm afraid for you, David. But after all, the Waltons never give in until they're dead. You understand, boy. And now—I am so tired." The old man's form sank gently back among the pillows, and the Lone Ranger, hat gripped in his strong hands, bowed his head reverently.

"A long rest, and soon! I am glad to have met you, friend."

An hour later Dave, Tonto, and the Lone Ranger gathered at the little tent, where Old Clem kept an awed watch over the great silver stallion. The Ranger inclined his head towards the sick room he had just left. "There died a *man*!"

"God grant I may be half as much a man," murmured Dave. "If Kate Stevens doesn't go back soon, perhaps I will be one."

"You would be, Sonny, anyhow," spoke Old Clem, his singularly cracked voice rising from a throat red and wrinkled as a turkey cock's. "I've knowed your father, man and boy, for forty years, and I know there ain't a drop of yaller blood in him that he could pass on to his son. Don't worry, Sonny, Old Clem will stick by you, thick 'er thin. His eyes maybe ain't so good for night-to work, but he can still spot the ace of spades with a forty-five slug at twenty paces.

"Stranger,"—the old fellow swung around to face the Lone Ranger. "Let me apologize for doubting for one minute that this horse of yours was the big Silver of Wild Horse Valley. They just couldn't be no other, but how in

Hallelujah did you ever work it? Put some special salt on his tail?"

"Not so you'd notice it," grinned the Lone Ranger. "No, I just waited up on a ledge above Wild Horse Spring, and dropped my little lass' rope over his ears. He just gave up then and said 'Uncle,' as pretty as you please."

"That so, hey? Wa-ll, if I didn't hear you tell it, stranger, I'd a' thought someone was having a little fun with me—wh-what the heck was that?"

A long, gurgling cry bubbled through the night, seeming to come from all directions at once as it re-echoed among the tents.

"—That was one-legged Pete, or I'll eat my old boots, just as they be. Pete is cook for the Waltons, but to-night he was guarding a wagon-load of dynamite up near the rails. Come on, boys, somebody's got him all right!" and Old Clem was off at a hopping run, followed by Dave and the Lone Ranger. Tonto trailed them, leading the silver horse.

They ran twisting and turning among the tents until they reached an open space near where a raw earth embankment, crowned with wooden ties and rusty iron rails, lay in black shadows under the moonlight. From the distance sounded the rumble of a rapidly driven and heavily loaded wagon.

Old Clem snapped a withered hand to his side and blazed six shots from his revolver in the direction of the rumbling wagon.

"Not that it will do any good," he explained, mopping his head with his hip-pocket bandana. "But it relieves my feelings some."

Immediately the Lone Ranger slipped away and followed the wagon tracks at a rapid trot, despite his high-heeled boots. The others followed more slowly. Suddenly at a hundred yards distance they again caught

sight of the Lone Ranger bending over a dark object on the ground. Then they, too, ran.

"Did you say, Clem, that Gunner Maxim had his right arm broken, or his left?"

The Ranger's question went unanswered. "Just as I'd figured," croaked Old Clem, his ordinarily deep voice cracking with excitement. "They did for one-legged Pete — and with a knife, too — so's we wouldn't hear no shot."

"Poor Pete!" gritted young Dave through clenched teeth. "Whoever did it is going to pay for this job."

The Ranger rose to his feet and laid a steady hand on the boy's shoulder. "You're right, son,—if we can get real evidence—Clem," turning to the old timer, "Did you say Slotkin had his left or his right arm tied up?"

"T'was his right arm, as I recollect," snorted the old man. "But what in time *that* has got to do with it, I don't know!"

"Just take a look at the way the knife went into him," drawled the Lone Ranger, gently lifting the twisted body out into the moonlight. "He was stabbed in the back, but the blade went in under the seventh rib to the *left* of his backbone and traveled to the right as it went in deeper. Now can either of you figure out how a right-handed man would be likely to use a knife that way? A right-handed man *might* stab to the left of the backbone, but close to it in order to reach the heart; and if he was an expert, he'd have stuck the knife straight in and hit his mark.

"Now you notice that this murderer struck *far to the left* of the backbone, hitting the heart as the blade traveled to the right.

"Who do you know, Clem or Tonto, in camp besides Slotkin *who is left-handed?*"

Young Dave slapped his fist hard into his left palm. "By George, stranger, you're right! I don't believe there

is another left-handed man in camp, and I know all of them, or nearly all."

Tonto grunted an affirmative.

"Yo're right!" exclaimed Clem. "I know them all, and every last Paddy, boss, and panhandler, — yes, sir, even them two gamblers at the saloon, — is right-handed. Well, stranger, what would you say we order do right now? Chase up that wagon or wait till that son-of-a-toad gets back in camp and shoot him full of holes till he's plum leaky?"

"Neither one nor the other," said the Lone Ranger, his face stern. "What evidence we have would be plain to a one-eyed half-wit, but it might not get through a court of law. If you catch a dog with wool stuck in his teeth, you've got evidence that he has killed a sheep, and you can shoot him for it. But when it comes to a man killing another man, you have to rig up so the jury practically sees the killing done before they'll call him guilty."

"White man talk, talk, talk. Killer then go free. Me know!" grunted Tonto. "You give word and Tonto hunt 'um killer, and dry-gulch 'um before sun come up."

"That's a pretty good idee," chuckled Old Clem. "And if Tonto here don't bring in the bacon, why then we can have a Miners' Meetin' and string the son-of-a-gun up by the neck, all proper, 'until-you're dead-and-God-have-mercy-on your soul,' as the judge says."

Young Dave spoke grimly but thoughtfully: "We might arrange something like that, and if it didn't work, there's always old Judge Lynch, who doesn't ask for mercy on any skunk's soul. I think I have enough influence in camp to fix that without much trouble."

The Ranger's slow drawl cut in upon these blood-thirsty meditations. "Tonto's idea could be worked all right, except that it would make him a

murderer in the eyes of prejudiced people. Clem's idea doesn't sound much better for the same reasons; — Miners' Meetings are necessary some times, but they've got to be avoided when it's possible. They are not strictly legal. And Dave's notion of calling in Judge Lynch might get so popular as to threaten the lives of innocent parties later on.

"Now if you're willing, friends, to let me try my own way, I'll just get aboard Silver, and follow those wagon tracks, just to see what somebody wants to steal a whole load of dynamite for. The answer might be interesting."

The others made no objection, having been too much impressed by the Ranger's logic. The latter took but a few minutes to regain his silver mount; then swung up astride, and the two, horse and rider, once more seeming as if one creature, drifted rapidly away into the misty, moonlit prairie.

As on the occasion of the gray gelding's last ride, they went at a lope, dodging in and out of the shadows cast by butte and knoll and jack-pine; but Silver's coat was more perfectly in harmony with the silver light about them, and the Ranger's dusty clothes were not conspicuous. Moreover, the great half-tamed stallion possessed the almost silent gait of the wild horse who hunts, or flees from his natural enemies. Keen must be the eye or ear to which he would give warning within two hundred yards.

The wagon tracks, easily seen as thin lines of shadow in the patches of moonlight, paralleled always the line of new rails, over which morning work-trains must pass, loaded with extra hands for the day's construction work. Then, three miles from the tent city, they descended under a culvert's deep shadow, and stopped. From the blackness beneath the culvert arose faint sounds of tapping, faint grumblings of men's voices. Silver, as usual, had the quicker ears, and tossed his head in warning before his rider could catch a sound.

The Lone Ranger pulled up short, dismounted, led off to a dry arroyo which almost paralleled the tracks, and there concealed, approached the culvert at an angle. As he crept along, Silver's soft muzzle almost touched his back, and Silver's steps were as soundless as his master's.

Peering cautiously from the corner of the arroyo bank, the Ranger watched proceedings in the culvert as closely as the lack of light permitted there. His ears told him more than his eyes. He could make out the dim outline of the dynamite wagon, so placed that it stood in the center, just under the timber-supported tracks. Three men were scrambling alternately up and down the bank from the wagon to the tracks a few feet east of the culvert, apparently laying a thick fuse of some material or other from the rails themselves to the load. They worked rapidly, and in half an hour they were done. Then they cut the traces of the two wagon horses, and drove them with brutal kicks out into the prairie. Two of the men led three saddled horses from a nearby hiding-place, and the three mounted. As they rode away into the moonlight, the third man appeared to be holding his right arm stiffly bent, as if in a sling.

Half an hour later, the Lone Ranger tied Silver's bridle reins to a low-growing sage bush, and crept carefully forward to the hidden wagon. The half-hour start which he had given the three miscreants was to avoid any possibility of their delaying in hiding, to watch their back track. Now, if ever, the Lone Ranger wished to work unseen.

As he had suspected, the three outlaws led by Slotkin, had taken enough sticks of dynamite to lay a closely-wrapped, double fuse of stick-dynamite from the wagon to the rails, where it was affixed in two paces thirty feet west of the culvert; and in each place it was capped cleverly by a brass detonator painted brown

and fastened on the top of the rusty rail. The fuse was, of course, covered with earth, and set to go off just when the first box cars rumbled over the little bridge.

The Ranger smiled his appreciation of the trap. It was practically perfect, practically certain to work on the instant that the engine's wheels detonated the fuse. Since the fuse was made of dynamite sticks strung closely like double links of sausage, it would be sure to set off the load on the wagon in a split second, and blow the middle sections of the train sky-high. The slaughter of the packed laborers in those cars blown up would have made gravestones unnecessary for most of the men.

With grim humor the Lone Ranger now went to work. Shaking the dirt camouflage off the fuse, he proceeded to unwrap carefully the linked dynamite sticks. Next, with a sharp knife-blade he gently slit the oiled-paper wrappings of the dynamite compound that made up the fuse, and emptied its entire contents into a pile which he carried away and buried. Next, he re-strung the empty paper cylinders, wrapped them again in the old sacking which the outlaws had used, covered the whole with earth as it had been before, and then proceeded to empty the wagon box of all its deadly load. This dynamite he carried a hundred yards away into the desert, and buried it in small bundles under grease-wood bushes.

The trap laid by Slotkin was now harmless, with not a crumb of dynamite within a hundred paces; and the fuse was just so much paper and rags.

The brass detonating caps fastened on top of the rod would explode with about the same noise and force of a rifle cartridge when the engine wheels struck them. The train crew, thinking their regular signal torpedoes, would stop the train, look around the culvert to see what was wrong, and would be sure to discover the dummy fuse and empty wagon. They would be puzzled at the harmless contraption, and would report it in camp.

Slotkin might guess what had really happened, but only the Lone Ranger and his friends would know.

Chuckling to himself, the Ranger returned to his silver mount, ran a rough, playful hand between the stallion's ears, untied him from the sage bush, and swung to the saddle. Half a mile back on the return trail he was still laughing.

Like a pale ghost, Silver and his rider drifted into the shadow of Old Clem's little tent, where the Ranger made himself known by scratching on the canvas fly. Immediately the old man's head was stuck out between the tent flaps like the head of a mud turtle between its shells. Some inches below the head the moonlight glittered on the long barrel of a hawg-leg Colt's 44.

"Don't shoot, I've got my hands up, Clem!" laughed the Ranger. "I never would have thought you were so spooky. You might shoot a hoptoad by accident some night and wake the whole camp."

"Huh!" snorted the timer, disgustedly. "A hoptoad would make a darn sight more noise than you, comin' up that way. Has that wild horse of yours got paws like a catamount instead of hooves?"

"Not exactly," drawled the Ranger, seriously, "but I shouldn't be surprised if he is half catamount at that. What I came to ask you, Clem, was to lend me a little pork, flour, and tea for a few days, and to tell Tonto to meet me as soon as he can where I met him just at sunset yesterday. It's near morning now, so I'll get back and be waiting for him."

"All right, stranger, I'll find Tonto right after daybreak and give him your message, and I won't say a word to anybody about you and your catamount horse until you give the word."

"I'll appreciate that, Clem, and I'll be obliged if you'll pass the same word on to Dave Walton and Miss Kate as soon as you can see them."

With a wave of his hand, the Lone Ranger drifted off into the moonlight, heading for the little glade where Tonto had cooked his "Injun medicine." Half an hour's gallop brought him to the spot, where Silver was unsaddled, hobbled, and turned loose to graze. In a few minutes the Ranger, guided by his woodsman's intuition, had discovered a tiny spring nearby, where he drank and filled his hat. Carrying the water back to his perspiring horse, he bathed and rubbed the stallion's head, neck and withers. Then, removing the hobbles, he led the thirsty brute to the spring for a long, cool drink. The great horse sipped gently at first, then buried his nostrils in the clear water, after which he followed his friend and master back to the green glade.

The hobbles were replaced after Silver's tired legs were rubbed down. Later he would bed down nearby, his stomach fully of juicy green grass. As for the Lone Ranger, a brief supper of bacon, flapjacks, and tea was a simple prelude to the deep, sweet sleep of the desert dweller,—that sleep which is guarded by the alert, unsleeping senses, and can change at the snap of a twig or the sense of an alien presence into clear-eyed wakefulness.

Two hours after dawn the Lone Ranger was squatting before his breakfast fire munching fresh biscuit, with a huge mug of tea at hand. For an instant he paused in raising the cup to his lips, then grinned broadly, took a long swallow of the scalding liquid, and spoke quietly without turning his head.

"The top of the morning to you, old Smoky-face! Come out where a fellow can see you—the sun is fine. No, I won't put my hands up, so it's no use your waiting. You ought to think up a trick of your own instead of copying mine, if you want to fool me."

Grinning sheepishly, Tonto stepped from the pines at the Lone Ranger's back, hurrying to stuff a battered old

horse-pistol back into his waistband. "How you know I start to hold you up? Tonto make no noise. Your back is turned to me. Maybe you got eyes like coyote?"

The Ranger laughed as he tossed the tea leaves from his cup into the fire. "I just guessed, Tonto, with the help of that little mirror resting against that saddle of mine. That little piece of glass is what I use for an extra eye. It has saved me from a good many little surprises, one time or another."

The half-breed put a fresh pinch of tea leaves into the cup and emptied what remained of the boiling water upon them. Squatting on his heels, he stirred the brew thoughtfully with a twig. "Big trouble in camp this morning," he grunted. "Slotkin tell 'um fool story. Whole camp mad at Dave Walton."

The Ranger's eyebrow's went up in surprise. "So?" he murmured. "It must be a fool story. How come?"

"Everyone saying young Dave sent Pete with wagonload of dynamite to set trap under railroad bridge. Say Pete no like 'um trap, so unload dynamite and hide it. Say Pete run away, or maybe Dave trap Pete and kill him after, because he not do what Dave tell 'um. I tell Dave and Old Clem to say nothing until I talk with you. We bury Pete last night where no one can find him."

The Ranger scowled, then asked, "Why do they say that Dave would want to blow up his own railroad job?"

"Say maybe so Dave get paid by bad gang to spoil railroad job so that gang will get contract."

The Lone Ranger nodded. "It's a fool story but good enough to get a crowd like that on the prod. If they had time to think it over, and brains to think with, they'd see it was foolish; but Slotkin and his pals will see that the rest of them don't get a chance to think. Just how ugly do you think they are going to get over this business?"

"Maybe not too ugly, but many men throw down pick and shovel this morning. Young Dave not in danger yet.

Old Clem stick close to him with hands on gun belt."

The half-breed drank off his tea in one gulp, washed out his cup, and returned to the smouldering campfire.

"See 'um Glencoe come into camp on a horse just before work train came through. See Slotkin sneak into tent after Glencoe. Tonto get close up and listen."

"You did, eh, and what did they say?" The Ranger grinned.

"Slotkin say he not like the idea of blowing up train. No like do any more dirty work for Glencoe. Say he afraid to get caught. Glencoe say he know too much about Slotkin when he was Gunner Maxim. Slotkin swear plenty but say, O.K."

V

MURDER AND A MOB

Old Clem was mad—mad as a wildcat with wet feet—a creature he somewhat resembled—as he hopped around in front of his tent while the desert wind played cat-and-banjo with his bristly white beard and tangled eyebrows. He sputtered like an angry cat also as he faced the thick, squat man in front of him, whose oily grin was an insult in itself. The reason Clem was reduced to mere hopping and sputtering was because his visitor's right arm was in a sling.

"You cross-breed son-of-a-horned-toad and a side-winder," he yelped. "*You*, askin' to talk with *her*! Why, you'd contaminate the clean air for a hundred yards around. I wouldn't let you within shoutin' distance of Miss Kate! So you just take your dirty foot in your hand and clear out of here as if the cavalry was after you,—which I don't doubt they would be if they know'd where you was. Now you get!"

"You seem very much upset, Clem," interrupted a soft, laughing voice, as the girl herself appeared from around a corner of the larger tent. "Who are you getting ready to eat alive?"

"Why—Miss Kate! I don't know—"

"—That I could hear you? Heavens, Clem, one could hear you anywhere in camp." She turned towards the man with the oily smile. "Why, it's—it's Gunner Maxim!" She frowned coldly. "My father helped chase you and your tin-horn friends out of Kansas—"

"Sh-h-h-h! Please, Miss Kate!" the man begged. "They

know me here as Slotkin. I—I'm turning over a new leaf—going straight from now on. Yes, ma'am, cross my heart and hope to die if I'm not. I just wanted to ask you to take this thousand dollars and give it to Dave Walton for me. You see, I won it off him in a poker game some time ago, and—well, I admit I didn't play the game straight. Most of the boys around here have probably heard about it, so I'd be obliged if you would give this money to Dave some time to-morrow when you can find him with a whole lot of the boys looking on, and tell them this money is being paid to him as a debt from Gunner Maxim. Say it kind of loud, so they can all hear. Then maybe later on if any of them learn who I really am, they'll see I've turned over a new leaf and am trying to go straight. I'd pay it to-day myself except I'm afraid right now Dave would feel like shooting first and asking questions afterwards."

Old Clem tugged furiously at his bushy left eyebrow, his right arm hovering near his black walnut gun butt. "I smell something pretty strong," he growled. "It might be a fish or it might be a dead rat. It's probably what they call a premonition. They say the Devil can quote Scripture, so I suppose it ain't surprisin' if a born crook talks about goin' straight. But that smell I spoke of is gettin' stronger every minute!" He glared murderously at Slotkin, but the girl seized his gun hand and led him aside.

"Hush, Clem," she said. He *may* be talking straight and I hope he is. At any rate it is only fair to give him a chance."

Turning back to the smirking outlaw she put out her hand in a friendly gesture. "Yes, I'll take the money, Maxim, and turn it over to Dave, and I'll tell him it comes from the Gunner, without mentioning that Slotkin is the same man."

"And, please, if you don't mind, Miss Kate, give it to

him some time to-morrow, not to-day. Right after dinner would be a good time, when Walton goes out to superintend that new bridge they've started."

Kate's forehead wrinkled in a puzzled frown. "Why not to-day?—oh, well, all right, I'll give it to him to-morrow after dinner, if you say so. But it makes me nervous to have all this money around over-night."

"Nobody but us three knows it's here," replied the outlaw. "And Clem, here, will help you guard it,—that right, Clem?"

"Yeh, I suppose so," snarled the old timer. "If you had it you might change your mind between now and then. Anyhow, you clear out of here right pronto, Gunner Slotkin. I don't like the sight of you, an' I wouldn't trust you as far as I could heave a bull buffaler by the tail!"

Slotkin hitched higher the sling of his wounded arm, and walked away, still grinning. After walking in and out between the camp tents for some time in order to puzzle any observer as to his exact destination, he approached the one which Glencoe had temporarily commandeered. Scratching his finger on the back wall of the tent, he heard the wary cough from within which meant that the crooked boss was alone. The outlaw dodged inside quickly.

"Well, what luck did you have?" barked the Easterner.

"Fine as a frawg's hair," chuckled Slotkin. "She swallowed the bait, hook, line, and sinker. Wanted to know just why she should hand the money to Walton to-morrow noon instead of to-day." The outlaw chuckled again at Glencoe's alarmed expression. "Oh, don't worry, I didn't tell her nothing about *that*, and she didn't ask but once. Nobody knows, except you and me, what's got to be done before she shows up saying that the money comes *from Gunner Maxim*."

"Nobody had better know, if your hide is going to be worth a plugged quarter. If anybody starts suspecting you of bumping off that gang foreman in order to slow up the work on Walton's contract, I'll be the first one to shoot you. Otherwise they might guess the fact that I put you up to it." Glencoe spat the unlighted cigar out of his mouth, and began nervously walking up and down the narrow tent space.

"Let's go over this business again, Slotkin," he growled. "Just how are you going to work that killing to-night, and make sure that no one except Walton will be suspected? You haven't changed your plans, have you?"

"Nope, I haven't changed my plans one bit, and it will be just as easy as butchering a calf, only there won't be no noise or fuss. About two hours after midnight to-night I sneak up close to Murphy's tent. I know just the way his bunk sets against the tent wall, and he sleeps with his head toward the open flap. Now I don't go into the tent, see? I'll have a good sharp razor, and I'll just cut out a big square hole in the canvas just above his chest. I got a sheath knife in my pocket with the initials "D.W." cut in the handle of it. It's a long knife with a thin blade that will slide through two blankets as if they was cheesecloth. I'm not likely to miss Murphy's head the first time, but I'll run that knife into him three times quick, just to make sure, then leave it there. That handle marked "D.W." will probably throw the blame just where we want it."

The sun had been up two hours the next morning when Old Clem coughed discreetly outside Kate Stevens's tent. "Yes, Clem," came the girl's voice from within. "What is it?"

"I'd like to speak with you outside, when you get ready. Something has happened in camp which maybe I can tell you about better than if you just happened to

hear it from the general talk that's going around."

"Oh! Nothing's happened to Dave, has it?" Kate's tone showed her sudden alarm.

"Nothing has happened to him yet, if that is what you mean, Miss Kate, but the men are getting ugly, at least some of them, and I ain't too sure what might happen before night."

"All right, Clem, I'll be with you in just a moment."

Three minutes later the tent door opened and Old Clem beckoned the girl outside. "You see, it's this way," the old timer said, lowering his voice. "The same skunk that knifed One-legged Pete has been up to his dirty work again. Murphy, the foreman of the gang that's working on the new bridge down at the end of steel, was found in his bunk this morning knifed three times through the chest."

"Oh-h!" The young woman's face went dead white with horror. "That's terrible, Clem. But—why did you say it was the same man that killed Pete?"

"Because this job too was done by a man who used his left hand. It's got to be the same one,—somebody who is tryin' to slow up the work on Dave's contract. Frst he knifes Pete and steals a load of dynamite to blow up that culvert out back on the line. Then he puts Murphy out of the way, for two reasons: Murphy was the best foreman we had in camp for bridge construction, and he'll be hard to replace. But that ain't the worst; the killer left the knife sticking into Murphy, and showing plain on the handle of it is the letters "D.W." "

"'D.W.'? But surely, Clem, you don't mean that they think Dave is connected with it! Dave is no murderer! Why, it's too utterly absurd for anyone to imagine!"

"Yeh, I know, but some of them darn fools will imagine anything you tell them. Most of the camp isn't saying anything, but there's a few going around mumbling about a Miners' Meetin' or a lynchin' party

already. And I notice that your friend Mr. Slotkin and his pals are doing most of that talkin'. I'm hopin' they'll talk themselves right square into the middle of a nice quiet little shootin' party, with me and old Betsey here talkin' the loudest." The old warrior patted the walnut butt of his forty-four Colt's. "Furthermore, Miss Kate, I wouldn't give Dave that money in public or say it was from Gunner Maxim, where anybody's goin' to hear you. It might not do Dave any good right now."

"Why, what do you mean, Clem?"

"Well, figger it out for yourself, Miss Kate. I'm just sayin' that I wouldn't do it if I was you."

"But Clem, I promised Maxim that I would pay Dave the money this noon down-by the new bridge, and I intend to keep that promise."

"Maxim has been a bad sort, I know, but he may be trying to reform, and I don't believe as you do that he had anything to do with Murphy's death."

"Humph! You'll do as you see best, Miss Kate, but I've give you *my* little warnin', and I'll be on hand with old Betsey at the payoff, jest in case anything *should* go wrong."

As the old timer hobbled away, muttering into his whiskers, the girl stood looking after him thoughtfully. Then, turning as if she had made up her mind, she re-entered her tent.

Meantime in the little glade among the jack-pines, six miles east of camp, Tonto had just finished recounting to the Lone Ranger much the same story as that which Old Clem had told Kate about the murder of Murphy and the ugly mutterings of the labor gangs.

"Yes," sighed the Ranger, "that was a wise trick of Slotkin's, putting Dave Walton's initials on the knife and leaving it there. It doesn't make any difference to those thick-headed pick-and-shovel boys that the initials might have been faked on purpose to throw the blame on Dave."

They wouldn't think of it unless they had lots of time to think the whole business over; and you can bet your shirt that Slotkin and Company won't give them time to think.

"Guess we'd better get over in that neighborhood right after dinner, and see how things are going,—what say, Old Smoky?"

"Good!" grunted the half-breed. "Plenty places near camp where we can see 'um and nobody see us."

"Right again, you old lobo," grinned the Ranger, affectionately.

When dinner-time was over at the camp, the labor gangs moved slowly, in scattered, lagging groups, toward their jobs. It was plain that their customary cheerfulness had changed to a sullen, rebellious uncertainty; and Boss Glencoe, looking and listening from his open tent-flap, smiled a twisted, satisfied smile.

One gang had straggled well ahead of the others, making for the new bridge-construction. It moved slightly faster than the other groups, following the young engineer, Dave Walton.

Suddenly the beat of a horse's hoofs behind them made all stop and look behind. They continued to look, for the sight would have been attractive enough even in a fashionable country resort near the big towns. In a construction camp on the wildest plains of a continent, it would have made any crowd stare with open-mouthed admiration.

Kate Stevens was riding a beautiful black mare, whose swift, graceful gait matched with the girl's perfect horsemanship. She wore the riding costume fashionable in that day,—a tight-waisted, full-sleeved garment which swept downward in a long curve below the little boot that rested in the single stirrup of her "side-saddle." But instead of the English-Derby hat of the East, she wore a bright scarlet scarf which partly concealed the waves of her brown hair.

She brought the black mare to a sliding stop just between Dave and the gang of laborers. The young man took off his hat and grinned cheerily up at her. "Well!" he exclaimed. "This is a mighty pleasant surprise, Kate! To what do we owe it?"

"To Gunner Maxim!" she laughed back.

The gang, which had crowded closer, pricked up their ears. Gunner Maxim was a name well known for deviltry throughout the wildest part of the West. The mention of it provided lively after-supper conversations in even the remotest railroad camp.

"Gunner Maxim?" Dave frowned. "What on earth has he got to do with you or with your being here at this time of day?"

Kate's pretty face registered mock disapproval. "Weren't you in a poker game with him some time ago back in Kansas? And didn't you get the worst of it?"

"Yes," replied the young engineer, frowning in his turn. "But who told you about that, and what has that got to do with your chasing me up on the job like a sheriff after a horse-thief?"

Kate Stevens chuckled merrily at Dave's sour expression. "Gunner Maxim has turned over a new leaf and is going straight. You'll understand, I'm sure. At least you will when you see what he sent you. He gave it to me yesterday to pass on to you. Here it is!" she exclaimed, drawing a thick roll of bills from the coat of her riding costume. "One thousand dollars! That's the amount he won from you in that poker game, isn't it?"

Young Dave's face, as he handled the money, suggested that of a fish just pulled out of water. "But—why should he give it to you—to give to me—here?"

Kate turned her horse, laughing, and cantered off with a cheery wave of her hand, leaving Dave still clutching the roll of bills and staring at them in blank astonishment. But it was something far uglier than astonishment

which grew upon the reddening faces of the men about him. They began muttering:

"Gunner Maxim, going straight! The h—ll he is!"

"Poker debt! Call it a payoff and you'll be nearer right!"

"Say! Slotkin was talking this morning. Said he'd got the word somehow that Maxim wanted Murphy out of the way and that he might have fixed it up with this young feller here to get rid of him—"

"—And the initials on the knife that killed Murphy were 'D.W.'!"

"So that's the kind of skunk that's been bossing this job, is it? How about a necktie party right here and now, boys, before he can get away? There's a cottonwood tree not fifty yards off with limbs about the right height. He'll look pretty hanging from there with his toes turned up."

"Grab him, boys, he's thinking about getting at his gun—watch out, there!"

"A-a-ah! Now we've got you, you son-of-a-toad, you pretty-faced murderer!"

In a space of seconds the young engineer was seized by half a dozen pairs of brawny arms. He fought desperately, but young and wiry as he was, there was no chance for him to escape the toil-hardened muscles of the men who held him. He had not been given time nor breath to speak any word of explanation, and already the gang was carrying him with grim purpose toward the big cottonwood which loomed only a few yards away. A rope some forty feet in length, which one of the men had looped over his shoulder for use at the new bridge, was quickly knotted at one end into a running noose and thrown over a high limb. Rough fingers tore away the collar of the prisoner's shirt; the noose was dropped over his head, then tightened, all but shutting off his breath. Twenty strong hands gripped the rope's slack end, ready to pull at the given word.

But that word was not given. An instant before young Dave Walton's body would have been jerked aloft to dance the last spasmodic jig of death, a masked rider astride a squealing, striking silver devil scattered the angry crowd like leaves before a cyclone. A swift knife slashed the noose and a powerful arm sung the erstwhile prisoner up behind the rider's saddle. As if by magic, two silver-mounted forty-fives appeared in the rescuer's hands.

"Just scatter and don't try anything funny, boys," the unknown's hard, steady voice rang out. "And don't you stir from that tree until we're out of sight!"

Then the masked rider gave the shout that made him known thruout the West, "Hi-Yo, Silver, Away!" and in two minutes from the time of the rescue the silver horse with his double load had disappeared to the north beyond a rise of ground, and the gang was streaming back toward camp to give the alarm.

Out of sight of the cotton-wood and of the disappointed lynchers, the Lone Ranger swung Silver's head to the east, making for the old rendezvous in the jack-pine grove. Dave, clinging breathlessly to the saddle's cantle, attempted to gasp his thanks, but the Ranger shut him off.

"Plenty of time to talk when we get to where we're going, which will be soon. Meantime you just take it as easy as you can and don't worry about this horse. He could run carrying double for twenty miles further and never turn a hair."

"I believe that," laughed the young man shakily as he noted the tireless drive of the great silver haunches beneath him.

VI

THE COUNTERPLOT

The furnishings of Old Clem's tent were so simple as to give an impression of bareness. A rough bunk built of cottonwood poles, laced with rope in place of springs, matted and covered with buffalo hides and decorated with two bright colored Indian blankets,—this occupied most of the available space. A packing case in one corner served as bureau, washstand and table, and as a chair for any chance visitor. The remaining corner was occupied by the old man's saddle, bridle, lariat, extra pair of boots, and similar odds and ends. A rifle, cased in Indian buckskin, was held by loops to the ridgepole. A few articles of clothing hung from a bar that extended along one wall. Yet far as it was from civilized comfort, the little canvas shelter represented luxury to one who had spent most of a long lifetime as a wilderness hunter and prospector.

The tiny space seemed even more crowded, now that it was occupied by its owner and by the half-breed Tonto, who squatted on his heels beside the old man's saddle. Old Clem sat upon the bunk, his hairy chin clutched by gnarled fingers, his elbows resting on his knees. The two men stared at each other with all the solemnity of a couple of owls. It was just half an hour since young Dave Walton had been accused of murder by the enraged mob, had been almost hanged, and had been dramatically rescued by the masked rider and his silver horse.

"How come you not there when they try to hang Dave?" asked the half-breed accusingly.

Old Clem jumped like a jack-in-the-box, nearly

pulling out two handfuls of whiskers. "Not there!" he shrilled wrathfully. "What do you mean, you dried-up old wooden idol? 'Course I was there, you dumb fool. I was hidin' not a hundred yards off in a little arroyo, watching to see what was goin' to happen when Miss Kate gave young Dave all that money. But that lynch-crazy bunch moved too quick for me. I ain't so soople nowadays as I used to be, and I fell back a couple of times trying to scramble out of that arroyo before I could get started. I'd jest got to my feet when that big silver stud comes flyin' from Lord knows where and crashes into that gang like a steam engine gone wild. And by cripes!" the old prospector chuckled hoarsely, "a fightin' stallion don't need no claws to beat a hull herd of Daniel's lions. By the time I'd got halfway to the tree, our Ranger friend was high-tailin' it acrost the prairie with young Dave up behind him. Best circus stunt I ever did see."

Old Clem laughed again at the recollection. "But come to think of it, where was you, you old smoked-up hunk of rawhide? I know you was somewhere about, because we met when I was follerin' the gang back to camp."

"Me hide in other arroyo with Ranger, but he want to handle the job himself. I got 'um horse tied back there now. Foller you in on foot."

"Hmmm, so you did. Now then,—" the old man settled down once more with his whiskers in his hand, and the little tent was silent for many minutes while the thoughts of its occupants ranged forward and back over the recent events and what they might mean to all concerned.

"The point is," muttered Old Clem at last, "first-off, what's goin' to happen now that Dave is out of the picture, and secondly, what are you and I and Miss Kate goin' to do about it?"

"Think maybeso Glencoe be boss now," Tonto answered the first question.

"You do, hey? Well, to my mind they ain't any 'maybe so' about it! This is jest what that yaller-bellied reptile has been workin' for all the time. Dave will lose the contract just as quick as headquarters hears the whole story, and then all of our bunch including Miss Kate here will be about as welcome as a sheepherder in a cowtown, —and we'll last just about as long, too."

"You forget 'um Ranger," said Tonto, his black eyes glittering. "Maybeso he got something to say about that!"

Old Clem bounced again on his bed. "By glory!" he squalled excitedly. "I'd plum forgot about him. I guess it's our job, Tonto, for you and me to nose out all we can about what's goin' on in camp to-day and to-night, and then one of us will get in touch with our friend and tell him all we know. Then it will be up to him—and Dave. Meantime the worst question is how to tell Miss Kate. She'll be awful broke up about Dave's bein' accused and havin' to clear out on account of her givin' him that money in public. She'll remember too that I told her not to do it and not to trust that Slotkin as far as she could spit,—which ain't no distance at all, considerin' she's a lady and don't chew tobacco."

Tonto rose to his feet and moved toward the tent flap. "You tell 'um Miss Kate. I go out and nose around camp, like you say."

Old Clem sidged outside Kate Steven's tent like a hen on a hot stove while the girl herself stood regarding him with a rapidly increasing alarm. The old man hopped from one bandy leg to the other, took off his hat, wiped his head with an old blue bandana, shifted his tobacco and spat, clawed his whiskers, coughed, and cleared his throat. Then he repeated the performance with variations.

"Clem!" she cried. "Stop that horrible imitation of St. Vitus' Dance or whatever is the matter with you! Stop it this minute and say what you've got to say. Has something awful happened, or have you—?"

"Got some sort o' itch? No, Miss Kate, it's something a dum sight worse than that. You see, Miss Kate, I—well, I ain't no good at breakin' things easy to anyone, so I'll just spit it all out at once. Dave Walton nearly got his neck stretched an hour ago."

"What do you mean? Oh, Clem, did—the—"

"Nope, they didn't quite get him hanged, but they had the rope around his neck and the other end over the limb of a tree ready to yank him up. It was just touch and go."

"But what was it all about? Where is he now? And why—? Oh, tell me the whole thing quickly! Was it anything to do with that money I paid him from Gunner Maxim?"

"Yes, I guess there ain't no doubt that's what started it off. It seems that your friend Slotkin had been spreading the word around camp that Gunner Maxim had wanted Murphy killed, and had made a dicker with Dave to do the job. There was Dave's initials on the knife handle to prove it. So, when you gave Dave that thousand dollars they didn't believe it was for no poker debt, knowing the reputation of Gunner Maxim. They thought it was the pay-off for doin' the job on Murphy. They didn't stop to think there might be any other explanation. You see, nobody in camp but you and Tonto and Dave has ever seen Gunner Maxim before to know him by that name. Nobody else here knows that he is goin' under the name of Slotkin. And that, I mean, the way things worked out, was jest the way Slotkin had planned, from the time he gave you that money yesterday to the minute the rope was noosed around Dave's neck an hour ago."

During the old man's brief but graphic account, Kate Stevens had grown very pale, and as he finished she

leaned back against the tent pole in a half faint.

"Clem!" she whispered desperately. "What happened? What happened then? Is Dave safe now, and where is he?"

"Pshaw, Miss Kate!" said the old man, contritely. "I'm a dumb fool to have scared you that way. Should have told you in the first place Dave's all right, at least he's sound of wind and limb. You see, I wasn't far off myself, and if they had hanged him, I'd have been there on time to shoot a dozen of them and cut Dave down before he'd lost all his breath; but I didn't get no chance! Jest as I was gettin' started, that Ranger feller come up behind me like a howlin' tornado and jumped the arroyo I was hidin' in jest as if that silver horse of his had wings instead of hoofs. And then the two of them, man and horse, was into that murderin' gang like ten catamounts rolled into one, scattered 'em every which way, cut the rope, yanked Dave up behind the saddle, and was off before you could say Jack Robinson. Two minutes later they was out of sight. I never see anything like the way that rider picked up Dave in one arm jest as if he was a baby; and Dave weighs a good hundred and eighty if he weighs an ounce. Dave was too surprised and shook up to help himself any."

The girl breathed heavily with relief. "Thank Heaven they didn't hurt him! But oh! How could they *dare*? If I had been there, no one would have laid a finger on him. I'd have—"

"You might have got handled pretty rough, too, Miss Kate, so I'm glad you wasn't there. They'd have probably figgered you was somehow involved."

"—There, there! Now don't take on so, please!" he protested, as tears followed the girl's blazing indignation. "I know you'd have wanted to fight the whole bunch, but then you ain't so strong as—well as Marthy Boyle, she that was Tom Boyle's sister and could heave

up a hogshead full of pork over the tailboard of a wagon without no help. Now, you jest set down in here," he went on, leading her through her open tent-door to a camp chair, "—you set here, and I'll tell you about Marthy, and you jest forgit to blame yourself for what you couldn't have helped happening to Dave, even if you *had* been there!"

Kate sank down on the camp chair, half crying and half laughing, while the old timer hunkered down by the door. "Oh, Clem," she gasped, "You're such a comfort-ing person, and patient with a foolish child like me! Go on, tell me about Martha Boyle, and I'll try not to snivel. Where did she live?"

"Back East,—where I run away from as a kid. Her brother, Tom Boyle, was six-foot-six high, weighed more'n three hundred pounds, and was the strongest wrestler in ten counties. Marthy wasn't quite so tall nor quite so hefty, but she was a mighty good-lookin' gal, take her by and large. Lots of times some big, handsome feller would ride over from the next county sayin' he'd come to try a wrastlin' match with Tom but more'n likely it was really to see and talk with Marthy."

"Was that why you ran away from home, Clem,—because everybody else in that place was big and handsome?" Kate interrupted, with a mischievous twinkle.

The old man grinned, rubbing his withered knees. "You've guessed right the first time, Miss Kate," he chuckled. "I was jest born skinny and bandy-legged, and I couldn't compete with them handsome Green Mountain boys.

"Wa-all, anyhow," he went on, "one day Lem Blood rid over from New York State and found Marthy peelin' potatoes on the back porch.

" 'Mornin', Miss Boyle,' says he. 'Is your brother Tom at home?'

" 'No, he ain't,' says Marthy, 'but he'll be home soon.

Won't you come up on the porch and wait?'

" 'Don't mind if I do,' says Lem, tyin' his horse to the porch rail. 'I'm Lem Blood, of New York State and parts West. I've been places and done things in my time, and I don't mind sayin' that out West in the Injun country I've often killed as many as two hundred red savages in one day, single-handed, and hung their scalps to my belt. I can also state, without doin' injury to the strictest truth, that I can out-run, out-shoot, out-ride, and out-wrestle any ten livin' critters I ever seen, take 'em one by one or altogether. Why, even my Pinto Pony was knowed and feared from Missouri to the Rio Grande!' "

"Wa'all, Miss Kate, that kind of talk would mebbe have gone all right with some gals; but Marthy Boyle jest couldn't stand a liar. So she puts down her pan of potatoes and stands up.

" 'Mr. Blood,' she says, smilin' as sweet as you please, 'Jest what might be your business with my brother Tom?'

" 'Why,' says Lem, 'I've heard he was a pretty good wrestler, and I thought he might try a friendly match with me. Of course, Miss Boyle, for your sake, I'll be careful not to hurt him!'

" 'Why, Mr. Blood,' says Marthy, 'that's real kind of you, seeing you don't know me awful well. But perhaps I can save you a little time and trouble. It ain't no use to wait for Tom if you can't throw me.' And with that, she picks Lem up by the collar and the slack of his pants and throws him clear over into the orchard,—and him weighin' close to four hundred pounds."

"But, heavens, Clem!" Kate choked down a laugh. "The fall must have broken every bone in the man's body!"

The old timer pulled solemnly at his whiskers. "No," he replied, "it didn't, though that probably would have served him right for tellin' them gosh-awful lies to a

innercent young girl. Lem was so fleshy his bones was well protected. Only his pants were split, and, to give the Devil his due, Lem Blood was too polite to speak of them. He picks himself up smilin' and makes a bow. 'Much obliged Miss Boyle,' says he, 'for startin' me on my way! Now, then, if I can trouble you just to toss me my horse, I'll be gettin' along.' "

Old Clem got abruptly to his feet and chewed off a fresh quid of tobacco. "Well," he remarked, "I guess I'll be gettin' along, too. Tonto and me was talkin' just before I come here to see you, and we both figgered that the more we learn what's goin' on in camp, the better it'll be for both of us. Don't worry, I'll keep an eye on your tent and see that nobody comes snoopin' around."

"But Clem! Wait a minute! What's going to become of Dave? And of you and me and Tonto, for that matter? There's nobody in camp now except that visiting engineer from the East whom they call Glencoe, and I'm afraid he isn't to be trusted." Kate's voice showed her distress.

"I wouldn't trust him, neither," replied the old man over his shoulder. "Not so's you'd notice it. But Tonto has an idea about Dave,—that maybe this Ranger feller can do something for him. That remains to be seen, as the circus feller said when the elephant dropped dead on the street. Anyhow, you keep to your tent, please. With the camp upset this way, the less you show yourself, the better; and I'll be droppin' in every little while betwixt now and sundown to see that you're all right."

"Do that, Clem, please, because I'm really worried, and a bit lonely, too," she called after him as he limped away.

That afternoon Tonto again was able to use his ears to good purpose outside of Glencoe's tent. With some of the labor gangs refusing to work, there were too many people in sight to make it advisable for the half-breed to stop for

more than a moment at a time at his listening post; but he contrived to wander back and forth behind the Eastern boss's quarters and to overhear fragments of a conversation between Glencoe and Slotkin. From these he gathered that Slotkin was to be appointed foreman of a gang on the following day, since Glencoe intended to take over the contracted work in young Walton's absence. Tonto learned one more piece of news, which he decided to carry to the Lone Ranger without delay. Therefore, an hour before dark, he saddled his ratty-looking but tough little pony and galloped away to the east.

The conference that night over a campfire among the jack-pines amounted to a council of war between Dave Walton, the Lone Ranger, and Tonto. The half-breed had delivered his message, and squatted silently, staring at the fire with beady bright eyes. The talk was chiefly between the two white men.

"It's a waiting game now," frowned the younger one; "and of all games that is the hardest for me, right now, with the word being carried to headquarters that I not only have failed on the job, but am a murderer and a hunted outlaw as well. That's what cuts the worst."

The Lone Ranger leisurely poked a stick back into the campfire before he answered.

"That all can't be helped now, son; so you'd best not think about it. And those fellows at headquarters will be glad enough to forget in a hurry, if our little scheme works out according to schedule. All you've got to do is to think about that, and see if there's any way to improve on the idea as she stands."

"The way we've figured it out now, Slotkin is to be boss of the gang on that new bridge beginning to-morrow, and three nights from now they expect to run a work-train over it. Meantime Gunner Maxim, alias Slotkin, is to go out with his two crooked pals every night

and weaken the timbers that were put up when you, Dave, were engineering the job. They'll work quietly, and take care nobody sees them leaving camp or getting back.

"When that train rolls over the weakened part something bad is going to happen,—unless we stop it first. Glencoe has doubtless planned for you to take the blame, either for sneaking back to the bridge at night and trying to wreck your own work out of spite, or else for bad engineering in the first place.

"That's enough information for us to work on, and three days is more than enough time for us to arrange our own little stunt. In fact, two days will be plenty.

"Dave, how many men do you know in camp that you can trust at all now, considering how black Slotkin & Co. have made things look for you?"

The young man shook his head ruefully. "Not many now, I guess!—But let me see. There's Tim Holley and Frank MacDowell, both foremen; and there is the crew of Number Two Train, Engineer Pat Harrigan and his fireman, Welsbach. Then of course there's Old Clem. Those five men would sooner suspect themselves than me, I'm certain. And they're more or less popular with the laborers, so they probably could scare up a dozen or more who would carry through any plan we might work out."

"That's all we need, son, for the idea I've got in mind," said the Ranger cheerfully. "Now you fellows listen to me for a minute and see what you think of this." He spoke rapidly for several minutes, giving detailed instructions, pointing out the need for as close secrecy as possible, and warning against any slip-up in time or organization of the counter-plot.

"You see, it's all got to go like clockwork, or else it'll miss fire. But there's not much need to worry about that. Now, Tonto, you get back to Old Clem and send him to

me here right away,—you're taking his place keeping guard over Miss Kate while he's gone.

"Dave, you roll up now in those blankets by the fire and try to get a little rest while I wait up for Old Clem. I know you don't feel sleepy, but you've got to try it anyhow. You've had a hard day, and you've got to keep your nerve for what's coming."

Two hours later, the old prospector arrived, still grumbling about being pulled out of bed in the middle of the night; but the gleam in his pale blue eyes showed how really eager he was to take part in the adventure that he sensed was coming.

The Lone Ranger came quickly to the point. "The biggest part of our little game depends on you, Clem," he began, and then named off the four other men whom Dave had recommended as trustworthy and capable. "You see, it's your business to get hold of these two gang bosses and the engine crew of Number Two, make them understand down to the last detail what they've got to do, and at the proper time. Then you've got to organize and lead a half-dozen or so of the boys to sneak up on Slotkin and his two pals, catch them red-handed at the job of destroying the supports of the bridge, and see that none of them gets away until the big crowd arrives.

"Tonto will act as scout. He'll find out just the time, two nights from now, when the crooks have started work on the bridge supports. Then he'll get back to you and your little posse with the word to creep up and surround the three of them. MacDowell, Holley, and the engine crew will tend to the rest of the show, and I'll have my little part to play, too. Can you get some red flares, by the way? You can, eh? All right. Now I'll tell you what we want to do with them."

Half an hour later, the old man got to his feet with a grunt and snagged off a fresh quid from his tobacco plug.

"I guess I got all that straight, friend, and I don't see why there should be any hitch in working the game jest as you laid it out. If I can find some good, reliable feller to take my place guardin' Miss Kate while I'm leadin' the posse, everything will be all hunky-dory. I'll get back now and grab a few hours' sleep, and then start the organizin' jest afore breakfast. That is the best time to ketch them fellers alone and in private."

VII

REDHANDED

On the second night after the campfire conferences at the Lone Ranger's hideout, the two foremen, Holley and MacDowell, were standing outside the latter's tent conversing in whispers.

"Can you figure what it's all about, Tim? That short note from young Dave didn't say nothing except that if we wanted to do him, as well as ourselves, a mighty important service, we was to follow Old Clem's instructions to the letter. Well, we've done that, but Clem's instructions didn't say a word about what's going to happen."

"No, Frank, so far as guessing what will happen, I'm just as innocent as you. Maybe we'll all be guilty of something or other before morning, but that don't make any difference. I'll back Dave Walton to the limit, no matter what the game. All I know is that we're supposed to wait here from midnight on, until someone comes up and gives us the high sign. Then we're to hustle both our gangs out of bed, load 'em into a couple of box cars behind Number Two Engine, and wait to see what turns up next. All we've got to tell the gangs is that there's an emergency job on, and no more than that."

"It all looks mighty mysterious, Tim, my boy, but bedad, if Dave Walton's behind it we're on solid ground. 'Tis no quicksand he'll lead us into, at any rate. Whist! Isn't that someone coming along between the tents now?"

A dark figure materialized suddenly out of the shadows beside them.

"Time now to get gangs up and into cars," the man murmured. "Old Clem say make 'um quick!"

"Bejabers, 'tis the half-breed that hangs around Miss Stevens and the old whiskered felly!" breathed Frank MacDowell. "Come on, Tim, 'tis the high sign we were waitin' for." As quietly as possible, the two foremen roused their labor gangs, silenced their profane complaints at being pulled out of bed, and hustled them into the box cars of Number Two. Since dressing in most cases consisted of pulling on boots and buckling belts, the business was accomplished in a very few minutes. The engine, with steam hissing through the escape valves, pulled them out of camp and rolled like a stealthy monster down the new track toward the bridge.

But within a half a mile it pulled up short, as a red flare, the lurid danger-signal to all railroad men, burst into rosy light not a hundred yards down the track. For an instant the figure of a black-garbed rider on a gigantic silver horse appeared, outlined against its ruddy background. Then came a swift thudding of hoofs, sliding to a stop beside the engine, and a hard, level voice called, "Pile out, everybody, and no noise, mind you! The trouble's down the line, and you've got to come on foot."

Before the astonished gangs could raise a protest, Engineman Pat Harrigan's rich brogue rang out. "'Tis all accordin' to orders, men. Do as that rider says, with niver a bit of back-talk. I'm comin' with yez, and leavin' the engine to Welsbach. And mind yez don't make a noise with yer flat feet, louder than a troop of cavalry. 'Tis quiet you must be!"

Thus reassured, the forty-odd pick-and-shovel artists descended from the train and followed past the red flare and down the dark track toward the bridge. Just before they reached it, red lights sprang out beneath the bridge structure, throwing into sharp outline a dramatic and surprising scene.

In a circle thirty feet in diameter stood Old Clem, Dave Walton, and six other men of the camp with their rifles trained upon a frightened trio in the middle. One of these was Slotkin, his good left arm stretched high above his head. The other two, known as recent additions to the camp community, held their hands equally high, but clutching a saw and a crowbar—evidences of the work at which they had been surprised. In the red light of the flares, the faces of all three were ghastly with fear and anger.

The two labor gangs from the train crowded outside the armed circle in open-mouthed amazement. There was a long moment of silence, which was broken by Old Clem who stepped forward a pace and addressed the prisoners.

"You stinkin' reptiles can put your hands down, now," he barked, "and if you want to get away, you can take your choice between a bullet in the belly and bein' torn to pieces by these fellers here, who would take pleasure in so doin' when I get through talkin' to 'em. Boys," he went on, turning to the wondering crowd, "these three unmentionables are Gunner Maxim, alias Slotkin, who's been shootin' off his mouth quite promiscuous around camp, and his two gentle little playmates, 'Spig' Gomez and Killer Murdock. Not so long ago they hauled a wagon-load of dynamite under a culvert some miles back on the line, and fused it to blow up a morning work-train full of men. Some of you would be lyin' scattered all over the landscape by now, if a friend, who don't want his name known, hadn't spoiled that little trap. Maybe you've heard something about it already, though o'course you had no way of knowin' who these would-be dynamiters was."

The angry growls of the crowd showed that they certainly *had* heard about it and were itching to get their hands on the plotters.

"Jest a moment, men!" the old plainsman cut in sharply. "You can express your feelin's later. The story ain't done yet. You remember One-Legged Pete, the boss's cook who disappeared the night that dynamite was stole? Well *he* didn't steal it. He was found by me and two-three others, knifed in the back and layin' up by the edge of camp where they'd throwed his body off the stolen wagon.

"That was the first murder. Murphy's was the second; and you all know how *he* died,—in his sleep. The p'int I want to make is that both of these dead men was knifed by a *left-handed* feller, or at least by some one who had a reason for not bein' able to use his right hand. If you jest look around, you'll see a certain two-legged snake who hasn't been able to use his *right* hand since he come to camp!"

The mob's growling rose almost to a howl of rage, as it surged forward, every eye fixed on Gunner Maxim's useless right arm. With great difficulty Old Clem managed to halt the movement and gain a certain amount of quiet.

"That self-same two-legged sidewinder, that you knew as Slotkin, had quite a lot to say about them two murders, not to mention the dynamite trap, and about who he thought was responsible for 'em. He'd even marked the knife that killed Murphy with Dave Walton's initials,—as plain a piece of faked evidence as ever was, only some of you didn't stop to think that out! If you'd looked twice, you'd have seen that the knife was an old one, and the initials was fresh-cut into the handle of it. Would Dave, here, be such a fool as to incriminate himself? Or to use his *left hand* when he ain't left-handed, and the job to be done was expert's? Some of you never thought of that. Now, Gunner Maxim here *is* an expert at murder, and has the reputation of usin' either hand with equal success.

"And now we come down to this little play to-night, at which you're the invited guests of me and Mr. Walton. You notice that saw and that crowbar in the hands of 'Spig' Gomez and Killer Murdock? Well, when me and Dave Walton and these other six boys with rifles snuck up on them an hour ago, the rats were usin' them same tools on the supportin' timbers of this new bridge. They was usin' them last night, too. They covered up their work pretty good, but if you step close you'll see that sixteen of them supports and cross-braces has been sawed almost through, and the saw marks filled up with mud so as they wouldn't show. Up overhead, the iron rails is restin' on loose ties; and considerin' everything, you can jest about guess what would have happened to-morrow when the first train started to roll over 'em, with some of you fellers aboard!"

The furious, howling laborers now charged forward so determinedly that young Dave and the six riflemen had all they could do to keep the prisoners clear. Finally the mob fell back a few paces, and Old Clem's cracked, excited voice was heard again.

"Jes hold your hosses a minute longer, boys," he croaked, "you ain't heard the reason for all these monkey-tricks yet. If you wasn't too mad to think right now, you could easy figger what the reasons must be. Old Mr. Walton, Dave's daddy, whom you all knowed and liked for a square-shootin' engineer,—he died of poisonin', probably arsenic. Then the Walton's cook, who was guardin' the dynamite, was murdered, and the trap was set to blow up a work train. That, like all of what followed, was aimed to slow up the work on this contract, and to give young Dave a black eye with the managers back East. The next thing on the program was to do away with Murphy, the best bridge foreman of the job, and to leave faked evidence against Dave, as I told you. This final act here at the bridge, which was to wreck

the work-train along with the bridge itself, was one more step to convince the managers that the job should be taken from Dave Walton and given to some one else. Who that some one else is, you'll have to guess, because they ain't no real evidence there.

"The main thing is, some skunk or some pack of skunks have been tryin' to get the contract by gettin' rid of the Waltons, father and son, and so slowin' up the present contractor's job. We've ketched the murderers and dynamiters red-handed, and we've proved thereby that Dave Walton, your chief, is innercent. Now then, boys, let's give that young feller there three hearty cheers, jes to show him we all feel the same way!"

The cheers rang out, propelled by fifty pairs of leather lungs, and with the crowd's attention thus distracted for the moment from the three prisoners, Killer Murdock saw his chance.

Swinging the heavy crowbar with which he had been caught, he smashed one man's skull, broke another's arm, and bowled over three more who stood between him and liberty. Instantly Gomez and Gunner Maxim darted after him through the broken circle and disappeared into the night. The crowd yelled like a pack of wolves robbed of their meat, and scattered in pursuit; but in the darkness their quarry, well trained in such grim games of hide-and-seek, was lost. The red flares were burning out and cast no light whatever beyond a few yards.

Sullenly, with bitter oaths, the gangs straggled back to the waiting train up the line. The engine snorted, coughed, the driving wheels ground against steel rails, and the now wide-awake men were trundled back into camp, still furious, but with a growing sense of relief. The mysterious murders were solved, the young chief was cleared of all guilt, and back on the job to keep discipline and direct the work. Last but not least, the camp was rid of three dangerous killers, at least for the time being.

The train had not yet stopped when Old Clem pulled Dave to the ground and hurried him off at a trot in the direction of Kate Steven's tent. "Not that I'm so worried about leavin' her," he explained. "Jerry Malone is on guard with a six gun, and while he couldn't hit a box car at ten feet distance, he's a good, reliable lad. Main thing is that Miss Kate's been worried plenty about you, and she'll want to see you're safe and sound before she goes to sleep. Made me promise I'd bring you dead or alive—though she'd prefer you alive, I shouldn't wonder!"

Apparently Miss Kate was wide awake, for the glow of two lanterns showed through the canvas as they approached. But as Old Clem was about to announce their arrival, a bulky body hurtled around the corner and seized the two visitors in a bone-breaking grip, while a voice bellowed in thick Irish brogue. "So yer back again, ye shpalpeens! Begorra, ye'll not get away this time until Oi've knocked yer domned heads together, ye blasted kidnappers!"

"Whoa! Pull up, Jerry Malone!" squalled Old Clem, as the big Irishman started to carry out his threat. "Who in Sam Hill do you think you've caught, anyhow?"

"By the powers above," gasped Jerry, releasing his captives so quickly that they almost fell over. "Sure and it's Auld Clem himself, and young Dave Walton. Faith, 'tis glad I am to see ye this minute, afther all that's happened in the last half-hour. I thought you were two of the same bloody scuts come back afther *her*—"

"What's this about kidnappers?" barked Dave. "And where is Miss Kate?"

"I'm here, Dave, and safe," the girl's voice spoke from the doorway. "Safe, thanks to Jerry Malone! But come inside, all of you. Oh, Dave, you're not hurt? I was worried—"

"Not hurt a bit, Kate," Dave reassured her. "But what about you? Did any one lay hands on you? If he did, by

George, I'll find him and tear his throat out!"

"Hush, Dave, no one has hurt me, but I was awfully frightened. Just take a look around this tent!"

"It surely looks as if a cyclone had struck it, any way," drawled a calm voice from the doorway. The four of them spun around to face the Lone Ranger, over whose shoulders twitched the ears of his silver horse.

"The Ranger!" breathed Dave.

"Come in, if you can git in," cackled Old Clem, indicating the over-crowded quarters. "We're jest to hear the story of how and why Miss Kate's tent was mussed up this way."

"Thanks, Clem," smiled the Ranger. "I'm afraid I couldn't get Silver inside, too, so we'll both stand here and listen. What happened to Miss Kate?"

The girl sat down shakily upon her bed, and tried to laugh. "All this excitement seems so ridiculous, now that it's over!" she protested. "But I was frightened nearly to death when those three men crept into my tent less than half an hour ago, and one of them covered my mouth with his dirty hand, telling me to keep quiet. They said I wouldn't be hurt unless I made a noise, while they were collecting all the food supplies they could lay hands on. I was scared on Jerry's account, too,—I thought they must have killed him or knocked him out before they came in. But it seems that Jerry was on the other side of Old Clem's tent making his rounds, and they hadn't seen him or he them.

"Well, to make a short story of it, after they had packed up all the food they could find, one of them suggested carrying me off, too, as a hostage. Whether they would have been so foolish as to do that or not, I don't know; but I screamed right then, and immediately some one shot off all six chambers of a revolver just outside the tent."

"Oi didn't dare shoot towards the tent for fear of

hittin' Miss Kate," explained Jerry sheepishly, "so Oi just blazed away into the air."

"And left every dumned chamber of your gun empty?" shouted Old Clem in dismay. "If they'd fired back at you, you wouldn't have had a chance. Not that you'd 'a' had any chance against three gunmen anyhow, you never havin' had a six gun in your hand before."

"Anyhow, Clem, it worked," Kate smiled. "Those three didn't even look at me again, but burst out through the back flap of this tent with their bundles, and were gone before I could scream again."

"Did you recognize any of them?" demanded Dave, asking a question no one had thought of up to this moment.

"Yes, I did," replied Kate soberly. "There was one light burning in here, and I recognized them easily. They were Gunner Maxim and two hard-faced characters whom I have seen in his company lately."

The astonished silence of the other men was broken by the Ranger's quiet chuckle. "In a way of speaking," he explained, "the joke's on me. You see, after those rannies lit out into the prairie, up by the bridge, I figured they'd have horses close by. If they did, I thought I could trace them by the sound of their hoofs, so I scouted around the most likely hiding-places, but couldn't find a sign of them. What they actually did was much smarter,—heading back to camp where nobody would expect them to go, getting supplies from what they thought was sure to be an unguarded tent, and then lighting out.

"No doubt they did have horses tied out in the brush beyond this side of the camp, and they'll be miles away by now, making for no one knows where. Of course, they might come back again, if the dirty boss they're working for needs them badly enough, but they'll come at night and keep under cover from now on."

VIII

THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS

The next morning found young Dave Walton hard at work, answering and receiving telegrams from the nearest Western headquarters of the railroad. The man who carried these messages between Walton's tent and that of the wire operator seldom had five minutes' rest.

News of the murders, the attempted dynamiting of the culvert, the accusation and escape of young Dave from the mob, the arrest and subsequent desperate break of Gunner Maxim with his two companions at the new bridge,—all these items of lurid news had been transmitted by some one, probably by Glencoe himself, to the managers by telegraph. And now came the latest barrage of questions, orders, and comments over the chattering wires from Headquarters. Most of these now were addressed to Mr. David Walton, "Engineer Temporarily in Charge"; but according to a tip from the telegraph operator passed to Dave secretly, many messages came to Glencoe—suspiciously many. Glencoe's official business in camp had not been formally stated, as yet; and young Dave, during a pause in the stream of telegrams, decided to call a showdown without delay. He wrote the Easterner a note, requesting his presence in the Engineer's Tent as soon as possible, and sent the note by messenger.

Glencoe appeared within a few minutes, and smilingly took the camp chair Dave offered him.

"I've been wanting to have a talk with you, Mr. Walton, ever since my recent arrival in camp," he said, attempting a cordial tone. "But, what with your father's

tragic illness, and,—er, certain recent events, there seemed to be no propitious opportunity. I'm sure you understand." He smiled again, with the condescending air of an older man to a youth.

"I appreciate your courtesy," responded Dave, with a grim twist of his lips. He paused to fill a pipe from his tobacco pouch, and set it alight.

"I've met you once or twice before, Glencoe," he said after a moment. "That was when my father was alive, and you came, I think, as a kind of informal representative of Headquarters. Unfortunately, however, I am not yet aware of your official business in camp at the present time. If you will be so kind as to enlighten me—?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Walton! Here are my credentials. I hope you will find them in order." The Easterner took several papers from his pocket, and handed them to the young engineer.

Dave glanced at them briefly, and learned that Colton J. Glencoe was a qualified construction engineer and "our accredited representative for purposes of general investigation in all camps west of Benton. His authority, however, does not exceed that of the engineer in charge."

"I see," said Dave thoughtfully, handing back the papers. "And may I ask the particular purpose of your present—er, investigation, Mr. Glencoe?"

"Certainly, Mr. Walton. Two days before your father died, I wired to Headquarters for permission to stay on here awhile, in case an emergency should arise where I might be needed. You see, Mr. Walton, your youth and comparative inexperience might be expected to make things difficult for you, in case you were called upon to assume full charge."

"Emergency?" said Dave slowly. "Just what emergency had you in mind at that time, Glencoe?"

"Why,—er, your father's illness, of course. I thought that in case it should prove serious,—"

Dave's voice was deceptively mild. "You asked for that permission two days before my father's death?"

"Why, yes, if I remember rightly."

"No doubt you do, Mr. Glencoe. At any rate, the telegraph operator will have a record of your wire." Young Dave swung about, to fix the Easterner with a steely gaze.

"But two days before his death, my father was as well and strong as I am now. The whole camp can testify to that fact. Now, will you be so kind as to explain, Glencoe, *just how you knew that my father would be taken ill that very night,—mortally ill! For that was the "emergency" you have just told me you had in mind!*"

The Easterner sprang to his feet, his face changing from white to angry red.

"Walton, this is rank absurdity—!"

"It is!" broke in Dave, harsh-voiced. "By your own statement you wired for permission to stay on, thinking that my father's illness would create an emergency. And also, by your own admission, *you wired before he was taken sick!* Sit down, Glencoe! I haven't finished yet with my list of what you call absurdities."

Speechless, Glencoe lowered himself into the chair, glaring at young Walton with eyes that held a mixture of rage and anxiety.

"You asked for permission to stay on," continued the young engineer relentlessly. "When did Headquarters wire it back to you?"

"The same day—almost immediately, in fact," replied Glencoe sullenly. "The operator's record will show that."

"No doubt," said Dave. "Strangely enough, you didn't act on it. You were conspicuously *absent* from camp between the afternoon before my father was taken ill, and the morning after his death! Is it too absurd to suggest that you wanted an alibi?"

"It's crazy!" barked Glencoe. "Why should I want an

alibi? I had business in the next camp up the line!"

"I'm sure you did. Otherwise the alibi wouldn't hold water. But your business at the other camp took you conveniently away from here at a very critical time."

Dave paused to gaze at his visitor through squinted eyes.

"My father died of arsenic poisoning, administered in two separate doses, which together were enough to be fatal. The first dose was put into his food at supper-time, just after you had been sent to leave camp; the second dose, taken the next day, was probably contained in some pills given him by our cook, One-legged Pete. You yourself could not have administered either dose, of course. That is where your absence on business at the other camp protects you. But some one must have bribed Pete to do it; and lest Pete should later tell whom he was working for, he was knifed in the back before your return."

Some amount of his old assurance had returned to the Easterner. He sneered openly, and lit a cigar as he settled back into his chair, with an air of amused contempt.

"All this rigmarole means nothing to me, Walton, except that things have over-strained your mind in the last few days, and your imagination is running wild. What earthly connection could your cook, or his killing, or the supposed poisoning of your father, have with me,—except in the mind of an unbalanced boy? Though you don't deserve it, I'll give you some friendly advice: don't let any one else hear such nonsensical babbling as you've treated me to this morning. It can only get people upset and make you look ridiculous in the long run. You've no evidence that any thinking man would credit for an instant, to back up your ravings. And before long you'll realize it too."

"Glencoe," said Dave, slowly emphasizing his words, "we—I and certain good friends—have right now enough

evidence to convict you of being accessory before the fact in one murder, and of conspiracy with known criminals to wreck a railroad bridge,—enough evidence to convict you in the eyes of honest lawyers and jurymen. Shortly we shall get even fuller evidence to convict you of *all* the assorted devilment that has been raised since you started to ball up our work on this contract. I'm warning you that any more queer things happening in this camp will likewise be set to your account, and will simply tighten the rope about your neck. You'd be wise to clear out now, while you can—unless you feel you're in too deep to back out.

"I'm giving you your chance, Glencoe, because pressing the case against you now would take time I can't afford. You may not believe it, but the Waltons are going to finish this railroad job on schedule, in spite of battle, murder, and sudden death,—in spite of the devil and Mr. Colton J. Glencoe!

"Just one more word to sweeten your thoughts as you leave:—*are you sure* that nobody could have overheard certain conversations in your tent with Gunner Maxim, alias Slotkin?"

The Easterner's face turned as white as the linen handkerchief with which he wiped sudden, clammy sweat from his nerveless hands. His cigar lay forgotten on the tent floor.

Dave Walton sprang to his feet. "That hit you where it hurts, eh?" he laughed harshly. "Now, you slimy snake, get out of my sight!"

Glencoe stumbled to the tent door, his face beaded with perspiration. His mouth opened once, but no words came. Then the tent-flap closed behind him, as he dodged out into the sunlight.

Inside, Dave Walton dropped back in his chair and soberly lighted his cold pipe. "The rat is scared, all right," the young man mused. "But he's not scared

enough. He'll stay around, probably, and he'll be more cautious. Maybe it was foolish to put him on his guard; but on the other hand, it may save some lives by showing him just who would be blamed from now on for dynamite traps or knife-work in the dark.

"It's a good thing he went out when I sent him. Otherwise I might have messed up his rotten carcass too badly to ship it home!"

Within the hour Colton J. Glencoe was riding out of camp along the line of steel to the east. Presumably he was on another business visit to the next camp up the line. Presumably, too, he was unwatched from the moment the first rise of ground hid him from the tent city.

But his last presumption, which Glencoe doubtless shared, was wrong. Many hundred yards away, the eye of a carefully shielded and powerful field-telescope followed him until another rise of ground concealed him from his view.

Behind the telescope sprawled the Lone Ranger at the edge of a dry gulch, on whose rim grew only a few scattered clumps of sage and grease-wood,—a perfect hiding-place for the watcher, had it not been for the heat of a blazing sun and the total absence of any shade. But neither the heat nor the hours of patient watching he had put in that morning over-looking the camp with his spy-glass could dampen the Ranger's spirits. He laughed quietly to himself as he folded the telescope and slid down into the gulch where his equine companion stood, with trailing bridle reins.

"Silver Horse, how about a little quiet ride, just to stretch your legs? I've just spied a coyote over yonder that I'd like to keep my eye on for a while. What do you say, old pussy-footer? Can we do it without scaring him off?"

Silver snorted and tossed his head eagerly as his rider swung lightly astride. Anything, to the stallion's mind,

was better than standing still hour after hour in a dry gulch.

Riding cautiously up the side of a low bench of ground, the Lone Ranger caught another glimpse of his "coyote," which of course was Glencoe, just as the latter made a sharp turn to the south. Interested by this movement of his quarry, the hunter drew closer, himself unseen, while he busied his mind with the problem of Glencoe's destination. The latter kept steadily on in a general southerly direction, gradually climbing into rougher and higher ground, where the low hills were splashed with distant patches of jack-pine and cottonwood.

Suddenly the Ranger pulled up short with a sharp exclamation. "Silver Horse," he breathed, "I've got it now! I know just where he's headed. It's to that old camping ground the Indians use when they're on a buffalo hunt. Some of them are probably there now with their squaws and their tepees, using it as a headquarters for the little hunting parties that bring in the meat and the hides.

"There's an old saying that where you find a patch of hair, you'll likely find the skin. In other words, if we follow this 'coyote' to where he's going, we'll probably find some more of the same breed,—namely Slotkin & Company. They couldn't pick a better hideout, if they're friendly with the Sioux. Now that is settled, we don't have to follow this one any longer. We'll just circle around ahead of him and get there first."

A loosened rein, a touch of his rider's booted heels, was all the invitation Silver needed to let out some of his pent-up energy and dazzling speed. For dazzling he was, like polished metal, as the sun glinted on his flying silver body. To avoid chance watchers, the Ranger kept away from the higher ridges of ground, galloping along the lower draws whenever possible, keeping to the farther

side of every rising bench. For ten miles he traveled in this fashion, then swung Silver's head to the left, and rode in a wide half-circle to approach the Indian camp from behind.

Leaving Silver tied to a bush behind the nearest slope, he approached the tepees with all the plains craft of a wild redskin. Every bush, every depression in the ground in the way he chose to take, was utilized for keeping himself invisible; and once, when he had to progress over a fifty-yard stretch of bare, level ground, he used successfully the old-time trick of pushing an uprooted sage-bush ahead of him, as he crawled on his belly, stopped for long minutes at a time, crawled and stopped again. In this fashion he reached the hiding-place he had chosen, and unusually thick clump of brush and salt-sage, behind which a little hollow allowed his body to drop into perfect concealment. There, with his field-telescope set up, he began his second and more interesting watch that day.

At mid-afternoon a sudden barking of the Indian dogs warned the camp of a stranger's approach. Squaws, who were cleaning buffalo hides or slicing and drying the meat of fresh carcasses, dropped their work to catch up such small children as were playing about the tepees, and disappeared inside, along with the older children. A few braves and old men gathered in a bunch near one end of the encampment, while three or four scouts vanished into the sage-brush to learn and report the identity of the new-comer before he approached too near.

After a few minutes the scouts came back, trotting beside Glencoe's sweat-stained horse, and regarding the rider with a mixture of grim triumph and suspicion. It was plain that they did not know this strange white man, or his errand, but they felt themselves masters of the situation however it might turn out.

Glencoe pulled up before the little crowd of warriors

awaiting him, and stared haughtily over their heads, as if they were beneath his notice. It was clear that he knew at least something about the trick of impressing savages; for when after a time one of the older warriors stepped forward and inquired his business, Glencoe replied in the Sioux dialect, helped out by signs.

"There are three white men here who are my friends. They came last night. I come now to make talk with them. Where are they?"

The red leader received this question in silence, as did the others; but after a moment he grunted, and walked deliberately away, beckoning Glencoe with his hand. The Easterner rode slowly after him to the rear of the camp, where he dismounted and followed the old brave into a little hollow. there, under a half-shelter of buffalo hides, sat Gunner Maxim, "Spig" Gomez, and Killer Murdock over a greasy scattering of cards and poker chips.

The three upturned, unshaven faces held anything but welcome for the spick-and-span visitor, and their general appearance was, if possible, still more unlovely. They sprawled in boots, trousers, and dirty undershirts because of the heat. Such of their skin as could be seen was streaked with perspiration and alkali dust. Their manner was careless and defiant. But all this did not affect the smoothness of Glencoe's smile, or the suave cheeriness of his speech.

"More work for you, boys," he said without preamble. "Since that little job at the bridge turned out so disappointingly, it's time we were putting on the next act of our program."

Gunner Maxim sullenly rolled himself a cigarette with his left hand. "If it's going to be anything like the last act, you can count me out right now, Glencoe. I didn't like that bridge job one little bit from the start. I told you we was certain to be found out; and if it hadn't been for Murdock's crowbar and the luck of the devil, we

wouldn't none of us three be sittin' here now.

"And by the way, my smart friend from the East, how about a little cash settlement right here and now for what we've done at your orders? Except for that thousand dollars I handed to the Stevens girl, we ain't seen the color of your money. Lots of promises, yes! But you've got to fork over the cash P.D.Q., or we'll take it out of your hide!"

Gomez and Murdock growled profane approval of this threat. But the Easterner smiled more cordially than ever. "Now, men, don't get on the 'prod', as they say in your wild and wooly Western talk. This is the payoff, right now, or at least a good share of it. If there's anything wrong with the color of this money, please let me know!"

Watched by three pairs of hungry eyes, Glencoe unbuckled a thick money-belt and threw it on the ground, then stepped back and watched while the unshaven trio emptied the leather pockets of crisp, new bills.

"We'll count it first, Mr. Easterner, and then you can say the rest of what's on your mind," snapped Maxim, unable to keep the greed out of his voice. A moment later the counting was done, and the three ugly faces glowered up again suspiciously.

"Well, boys, what's the matter now?" Glencoe's pose was nonchalant as he selected a fat cigar from his case.

"Nothing the matter, except that it ain't enough," said Murdock, tucking his share of the bills into his vest pocket.

"You promised us t'ree t'ousand each one," squeaked "Spig" Gomez, his beady eyes glittering. "Now you geeve us wan half,—feeteeen hundred apiece! When you goin' to pay the rest?"

"When you've done the next job," replied Glencoe, cheerfully. "And out of that job alone, if you don't get more than three thousand apiece, it won't be any fault of

mine. More than three thousand, cash money!"

Gunner Maxim got to his feet and blew a cloud of cigarette smoke at the buffalo-hide awning.

"More likely cash promises!" he jeered. "But shoot your stuff, Glencoe, and we'll see how it listens."

"The camp payroll!" began Glencoe impressively. "You and I, Maxim, have played with that idea before this; but now it's in earnest. And I have a plan that *can't* go wrong. Not possibly." The Easterner threw away his dead cigar and lighted another.

"'Can't' and 'not possibly' is funny words," observed Maxim with an insolent leer. "Out here in the prairie country they don't mean so much as they seem to mean back in Boston. So we don't use 'em. Anyhow, we're still listenin'."

In no way embarrassed, Glencoe persisted, his smile unfading. He would not have smiled if he had known that the Lone Ranger's field-telescope was trained upon him from less than two hundred yards' distance,—and that the Ranger was an expert in lip-reading, so that he missed hardly any of the Easterner's precise words!

"Maxim," asked Glencoe abruptly, "how's that game arm of yours? Could you leave it out of the sling if you had to?"

For answer, the Gunner slipped off the black silk scarf that supported the wounded member. He moved the arm with only a little stiffness. "Can't use it much yet," he grunted.

"You won't have to use it at all," replied Glencoe, nodding. "But you'll have to put away your sling for a few hours. Maxim, did you ever get mistaken for an Indian?"

Maxim jumped, then cursed foully. "What the blanket-blank-so-and-so-forth do you mean, you cock-eyed dude? *Me* get mistook for a lousy redskin? You've got bugs in your brains!"

"No," replied the "dude," undisturbed, "only one bug,—that is to say, an idea. I mean that to do this payroll job properly, you and your two pals will have to masquerade for a few hours as Indians. You'll have to strip down to the buff, stain your skins dark, paint your faces, tie feathers in your hair, and braided horse-hair pig-tails, and wear nothing but a loin-cloth, moccasins, and blankets. You'll have to ride bareback and use a rawhide hackamore for a bridle on half-wild Indian ponies. And you'll have to screech at the top of your lungs, just like those red devils when they make an attack. Do you see now?"

"Yeah, I see," mused the outlaw, rolling another cigarette, "but whenever did only three Injuns, real or imitation, hold up a guarded payroll train? I suppose you're thinkin' of holdin' up a train, because there'd be no chance of touchin' the payroll once it gets to camp."

"Really, Maxim, there is a certain amount of gray matter inside your skull, after all. I apologize for doubting that in the past at times." The Easterner's lips drew down mockingly. "But to get back to our subject, you three will *not* be alone in the train holdup. You will be accompanied by forty or fifty more or less exact copies of yourselves, except that the copies will be real Indians, and you imitation ones."

Killer Murdock snorted disgustedly. "All I get so far from this dude's talk is that we're to get this bunch of Sioux buffalo hunters to help us raid this train, and grab the payroll. But here's the hitch,—as yet these pore benighted Injuns don't appreciate the value of white men's money. A payroll wouldn't interest them half so much as a couple a' yards of bright red calico or a handful of beads. How are we going to get them to ride with us and take the chance of gettin' shot by the train guards? Injuns ain't very self-sacrificin' by nature."

"You're right and you're wrong, Murdock," laughed

Glencoe. "I don't expect them to work for money, and I do expect them to be sacrifices to the guards' bullets, — a few of them,—while you three will naturally keep in the background."

"However," he went on more seriously, addressing Maxim, "the whole thing will be worked out much more safely than you suppose. In the first place, you won't run up against a cool and organized crowd of train guards. I've learned that a payroll train is due at camp at ten o'clock to-morrow night. The time is supposed to be secret, and it's at night because no one would be likely to suspect its coming then and try to hold it up. But I have my own ways of learning things. I also know that there will be after nine o'clock one car and an engine with steam up waiting on a siding in camp to carry four Headquarters officers back up the line after the pay train gets in. I have bribed the engine crew of that train to take a little trip down to the bar at about nine o'clock *and not to come back*. I communicated with them by an anonymous note, enclosing the bribe, and they made the sign of acceptance by two short blasts on the whistle."

"I shall see to it that about nine-fifteen to-morrow night that engine with its special car *starts down the track with wide-open throttle* to meet unawares the payroll train between here and the next camp east."

The startled expressions of the three outlaws proved how completely Glencoe had captured their interest. Therefore he paused to let his words sink in. After a moment Maxim threw away his cigarette and sat down. "Who," he said, "*is* going to be the engine crew to start that damned engine and get it out of camp? Engines ain't got brains enough to shift their levers and open their throttles."

Glencoe laughed heartily. "Not so much brains as you have, Maxim, I can readily see! No, *I* will be the engine crew, trundling her slowly off the siding and on to

the main track. It will be dark, and I shall take care no one sees me. Once out of camp, I shall simply throw the throttle wide open and jump off. No warning to the other train will be possible. There will be a collision, and you must time your Indian raid to strike immediately afterwards, when the payroll crew is shaken up, injured, disorganized, and unready to put up any real scrap. Let your real Indians take what bullets they do fire before the crew is killed off, and then you three grab the payroll. It's all yours, I claim no share of it; and in any case you will get the other fifteen hundred apiece I agreed to pay you after this job is done.

"Now about rewarding these Sioux Indian hunters for their part in our little show. Can you tell me what an Indian will sell his soul for quicker than anything else,—and not only his soul, but his horses and his tepee and his wife and children as well?"

"Spig" Gomez giggled evilly. "Dat ees easy to answer," he squeaked, "ze Injun sell anyt'ing and do anyt'ing for wheeskey!"

Glencoe made the Mexican a mocking bow. "You are right, Senor; possibly you speak from experience!"

The Mexican, at this implied slap at his mixed Indian-and-white blood, snarled like an animal, and whipped a knife from his boot. Maxim, rising suddenly, kicked the knife out of Gomez's hand and turned a sour look upon the Easterner. "You would ha' known better than to say that if you hadn't been a damn-fool Eastern dude. All Mexicans claim their great-great-granddaddies were pure Spanish, and the rest don't matter, unless somebody speaks of it like you did just now.

"Now you spoke of liquor for these Sioux hunters. Where you goin' to get it?"

"I've planned that," replied Glencoe, "but the getting of it will be your job. Farley, the bar owner, has just received a fresh supply of whiskey from up the line. It's

stacked in his store tent right now, and there's only one guard over it during the night. My idea is for you three to take care of the guard, load the stuff on the wagon that I'll have waiting for you just outside of camp to-night, and bring it back here sometime to-morrow afternoon. Then will be time enough to explain the scheme to these savages, give them a drink or two apiece just to prime their enthusiasm, and make all the other preparations, including getting to the railroad where you can all keep out of sight, near where the train wreck will take place. That's about half-way between the two railroad camps."

Glencoe stopped and puffed deliberate rings of cigar smoke, while the three outlaws turned the plan over in their minds.

Suddenly the Easterner arose, threw away his cigar, and nodded briefly to the trio. "Anything else you want to know, boys?" he asked. "If not, I must get back to camp immediately to make my own arrangements."

Gunner Maxim turned a jaundiced eye upon the dudish engineer's smart clothes, and ended by looking him sourly in the face. "Yeah," he drawled, there's one thing more, Mr. Colton J. Glencoe. I understand how we do the work and get the money without too much danger to our own hides. So far, so good. It all works out on schedule. But just what do you get out of it? You ain't goin' to all this trouble just for the love of me and Gomez and Murdock here, nor simply out of spite against Dave Walton. You're lookin' out for yourself all the time; and until I get some idee just *how* you're goin' to pay yourself, we won't touch this or any other job you ask for, for fear it might turn out to be at *our* expense in the long run."

For an instant Glencoe met angrily the outlaw's insolent gaze. Then he grunted approvingly, smiled, and lit a third cigar.

"You're right, Gunner," he said slowly. "I thought you guessed my reasons in general, or I should have told

you them before. They're short and sweet. You see, the Waltons were construction engineers working for a certain big contractor back East. They were doing such a good job that the contract could easily be fulfilled under the time limit, if nothing unforeseen happened.

"Now there is another big financier back East who wants this same contract, and will get it if the present contractor doesn't complete the job on time. This financier has engaged me to arrange, regardless of expense, that the present contract is *not* completed on time. Hence all these,—er, accidents which you have been helping me to bring about down at Walton's railroad camp. The hold-up of the payroll train is for the same purpose, namely, to make the laborers dissatisfied and slow up their work. Is it all clear now, or shall I go back and repeat it in words of one syllable?"

Maxim ignored the Easterner's sneer, and nodded understanding. "I get it now," he said drily. "By the way, when did you say you'd have that liquor wagon ready for us to-night on the edge of camp?"

"At three o'clock to-morrow morning," snapped Glencoe. "Be sure you are there on time. Any changes of plan that may occur to me I will communicate to you then."

Impatiently the Easterner turned on his polished boot-heel and strode back to his horse.

The Lone Ranger, after watching Glencoe ride out of the Indian encampment, crept back to where his horse was tied out, and mounting, rode Silver to a spot half a mile distant, where a tiny spring bubbled up in a grove of cottonwoods.

There he unsaddled the silver stallion, tied him with the lariat to a tree, and proceeded to rub down the great beast's sweaty back and legs with expert hands. Water from the spring, and oats from the saddle-bags, completed Silver's comfort. His master's own meal was

prepared afterwards, following the desert-dweller's rule to consider the needs of one's mount before everything else. A tired or neglected horse might often mean a rider left afoot or overtaken in a race with enemies upon fresher beasts.

Between mouthfuls the Ranger summed up the information he had learned by watching Glencoe's lips through the spyglass. He talked to Silver in a low voice as if the horse were a human companion.

"That's a right neat little scheme, Silver Pony. They wreck a couple of trains, steal a payroll, kill off a few guards, and leave the whole blame on a bunch of Indians that no one will be able to find afterwards. The only thing that will spoil it is that you and me'll be on the job, Pony, and turn the job backwards on them. We'll let them get away with that liquor to-night, so as not to scare them off, but we'll mess up their main plan good and plenty. I have a few ideas about that end of it now, and I'll have more before to-morrow night.

"Meantime, Silver Horse, let's you and I get a few hours of sleep while we can. I reckon your rope's long enough to let you lie down."

After scouring out his cup and pan with dried leaves, and spring water, the Ranger untied his blanket roll from the saddle, rolled up in it, and was almost instantly asleep.

He slept until after midnight, as he had planned, the set time, deliberately fixed in his brain, acting like an alarm clock. Many people, incidentally, have this faculty of waking up at an hour which they have determined in advance; but in the Lone Ranger, long practice had developed it to perfection.

After rolling up his blanket, he saddled Silver, tied him in such a way that a single jerk would loosen the knot, removed his hat and hung it on the saddle-horn along with his cartridge-belt and holsters. From a saddle

pocket he drew a long, heavy-bladed knife in a scabbard so adjusted as to hold the weapon flat under his shirt between the shoulder blades. One revolver he wrapped in a clean handkerchief and stuffed into his hip pocket. Then on foot he made his way toward the Indian encampment.

Arrived within a hundred yards of the barely visible tepee village, the Ranger sank flat on his stomach, and proceeded to worm his body as silently as a hunting rattlesnake toward one of the buffalo-skin tents which stood a little apart from the others. On this trip, actual concealment such as he had observed during his afternoon scouting was less important than silence. Fortunately, what wind there was blew from the village toward him, and thus could not betray his scent to any of the Indian dogs and set them yelping. But utter silence was necessary, and to accomplish it the Lone Ranger spent a full half-hour crawling those hundred yards, feeling each inch of ground ahead and around him with sensitive finger-tips before hitching his body slowly forward. This strange but effective manner of stalking revealed his purpose in protecting both knife and revolver from touching the dusty ground, yet having them ready for instant use.

No dry twig crackled, no brittle sage-brush swished its branches in the path of this expert hunter until he arrived close enough to the single tepee to touch its leather walls with his hands. His next movement was to draw the keen knife from its sheath between his shoulders, and, working cautiously, to cut a slit long enough to admit his body.

This feat being accomplished in almost perfect silence, the Lone Ranger parted the slit wall sufficiently to admit his head. That, he knew, was the most dangerous moment in his whole task. If any warning had awakened the tent's occupant, he might expect knife, bullet, or rifle

butt to descend upon him with deadly accuracy.

But nothing of the sort happened. Only a gentle snoring came to his ears on the opposite side of the tepee. It continued as the Ranger slid his whole body into the warm, smelly interior of the place; and then it stopped with a gasp. A slight sound of struggling bodies was the only sound that followed, as the intruder, throwing his body upon that of the sleeping Indian, choked the latter into unconsciousness with steely fingers.

After securely binding and gagging his victim, the Lone Ranger proceeded to make a search of the dark tepee, guided by touch alone. This business took up a matter of perhaps five minutes, at the end of which time a soft grunt of satisfaction announced that it was over. As silently as he had come, the Ranger left through the slit in the tepee wall, and crawled again in snake fashion to a safe distance where, getting to his feet, he hurried back to the cotton-wood grove.

"It was just as I thought, old boy," he chuckled as he swung aboard the eager stallion, after donning his hat and belt. "I saw that old Indian, who seems to be heading this outfit, go into that tepee alone. No squaw ever went near it, so I figured he'd be sleeping there alone to-night; and he was. Come morning when they untie him, he'll wonder who sneaked into his private quarters and stole his bow and arrows without touching anything else!

"Well, let him wonder. Maybe after the show to-morrow night, he'll get an idea of what I wanted with them."

The Ranger laughed again to himself as he lifted Silver into a long, mile-eating lope heading for Dave Walton's camp.

Three hours later, he was scratching gently on the canvas fly of Old Clem's tent.

IX

THE PAY TRAIN

Clem's yelp of profane disgust was cut short by a sharp hiss from the rider standing outside. "Come out of there, you old whiskered Gila-monster, and don't make any noise doing it!"

Clem's frowzy whiskers and sleep-bleared, angry eyes popped out suddenly between the tent flaps. "What in time is your idea haulin' me out of bed again in the middle of the night? Ranger, don't you *never* keep human hours? It must be nigh three o'clock in the mornin'."

"Sometimes I do, but I'll probably never get the habit of it," the rider laughed softly. "The point of our keeping quiet now is that our little friend Maxim-Slotkin and his pals are sneaking into camp to lift a load of liquor out of the store-tent of the bar. I just a little prefer that they didn't know we're awake."

"Prefer! Why, don't you want to stop the dirty sons-of-so-and-so's? Jest wait till I get my gun and I'll be right with you!" The old man would have ducked back into his tent if the Ranger's strong hand had not seized and stopped him.

"Sh-h! Hold on a minute, Old Timer! I'm perfectly willing they should take the liquor and get away with it. It would spoil my plans later if they were scared off now. I just came to ask you if you can get together a few sticks of dynamite and a couple of dozen red flares, the same number of detonating caps, and six feet of fuse. Pack them up in one bundle, and send them up to my hideout

east of camp by Tonto some time after sunrise. How about it? I'll tell you later what all the fun's about."

"Humph," the old plainsman grumbled, "What's that you've got on your saddle? Looks like an Injun bow and arrow. Are those some more of your little playthings, along with the dynamite and the rest of it?"

"You guessed it, Old Timer," replied the Ranger good-naturedly. "But how about getting those things I asked you for?"

Old Clem clawed at his whiskers as he looked dourly up at the Ranger's shadowed features. "All right, all right," he muttered. "I'll git 'em from Dave Walton before breakfast and send them by Tonto. If you won't spill what's on your mind, I suppose there's no use askin' questions. If you're goin' to play alone, you'll play alone, and that's all there is to it. Only," the old man snarled like a dyspeptic wildcat, "don't you dare wake me up again to-night!" The whiskers disappeared suddenly inside the tent flaps, and the Lone Ranger rode silently away, his grin hidden by the darkness that preceded a desert dawn.

When young Dave heard of Old Clem's midnight visitor and his strange request for explosives, a worried scowl grew on his already care-marked features. "Of course our friend can have what he wants, Clem," the young man answered. "He could have anything in camp, so far as I'm concerned,—except Miss Kate! Lord! Think of all that man has done for us, just out of generosity and his own love of adventure. He has the spirit of an old-time knight-errant, along with the keen wits and cleverness that only this new, brave country can produce!

"But speaking of Miss Kate, Clem, I'm worried about her staying on here in this rough-and-tumble railroad camp. I have a hunch that more dirty work may be tried before long by Glencoe and his crowd. That means more

danger to every one in camp, and who knows when Kate may be involved, despite everything you and I might do to protect her? She ought to go back East immediately. Much as I shall miss her, I've got to persuade her to do it. There's a special car leaving camp to-night with those four divisional officers who are here to-day. They'll be only too glad to have her ride with them.

"Another thing, Clem,—this whole camp is to be broken up and moved forty miles ahead. Much equipment is already on the way to the new campsite, as you know. To-morrow morning the tents will come down and the men will leave here in box-cars. So if Kate can pack up and leave tonight, she'll escape all that confusion.

"Clem, can you persuade her to drop in here at the Engineer's Office Tent some time this morning? I must talk to her!"

The old timer shrugged, and pulled at his tobacco-stained moustache. "They won't be no trouble gittin' her to come for a pow-wow with you," he replied, his old eyes twinkling. "Good heavens to Betsey! She ain't done nothin' but talk to me *about* you all the time she's been here, since your daddy died! But as for persuadin' that gal to pick up and go home jest because things is maybe gittin' a little lively in camp,—wa—ll, son, you'll have to be *some* good persuader. You see, if things go right, another month will see the hull job completed, the rails from the West meetin' ours from the East, and the first cross-continent railroad in operation. Miss Kate somehow considers that will be your personal and private triumph, son; and she's set her mind on bein' on the job to witness it. If you kin change her mind, you're a better arguer than me, that's all!"

On leaving the Office Tent with an order on the Supplies Tent for certain explosives, the old man attended first to this business, then dispatched Tonto

with the package for the Lone Ranger, and finally returned with Dave's message to Kate Stevens. Before noon, the girl appeared at the door of Dave's tent, flushed with pretty excitement and with the eager light of battle in her eyes.

Seating herself at Dave's embarrassed invitation, she proceeded to stare the young man out of countenance. He dropped his eyes to the desk, cleared his throat several times, and floundered helplessly for a way to open the conversation. It was not easy to tell the girl with whom he had fallen really in love, to leave and go back home, probably against her own choice.

All at once Kate broke into a merry laugh. "I don't wonder you feel foolish, Dave Walton," she said regaining a tone of mock severity. "You want to send me away like a bad little girl so that I won't be a nuisance to you any more. You want to tell me that a rough railroad camp is not place for a young lady, especially in all the confusion of moving to a new campsite. That you have had enough to think about without protecting me and keeping track of my whereabouts every minute of the day; and that you'll be very much relieved, the sooner I am out of sight on my way back East. There! Now I've said it all for you, haven't I? So why don't you sit up and say thank you?"

Dave's jaw dropped lower and lower with consternation, until his pipe fell out and bounced from the desk to the ground. "You—you've been pumping Clem, I see," he managed to choke out.

"Exactly," tittered the girl, pushing back a stray lock of her brown hair. "I can always pump him dry without the slightest effort. So I know, young man, what all your plans are regarding me. I know, too, that you're afraid of more trouble from Glencoe and his crowd, and that you feel that is all the more reason for my leaving camp to-night on the same train with the divisional in-

spectors. You want me to go right back now to my tent and spend the day packing my bags; and then you'll come around after supper and tell me how sorry you are to have me go, how I have been an angel of goodness, an inspiration to you in your work, and so forth, and how you are going to miss me.

"But it won't work, Dave Walton, it won't work at all! I'm not such a tender child as you think, and I'm no 'fraidy-cat, in spite of what you may think. In one more month the rails from the East and from the West are going to meet, and it will all be due to you, Dave, that they do meet on time. That will be your triumph, and I intend to be here to see it,—yes, and to stand by you through all the dangers and hardships during the coming month while you're winning your great fight.

"You can't keep me away, Dave! And if you could and did, I should never forgive you!"

The young engineer drew a long breath, and sank back into his chair. For a moment he stared wonderingly at the determined young person in front of him, and then surrendered. "All right Kate," he agreed, "I guess you win!" The red blood surged up through his face to the very roots of his hair. "I—I didn't dream that you cared so much!"

Kate's blush answered his own. "But now that you see that I do, Dave," she whispered, "you will let me stay, won't you?"

Dave threw her a glance full of admiration. "I shouldn't, of course," he smiled, "but I guess you've won the trick. You can stay, and I'll admit that in my heart I'm more than glad!

"But how are you going to travel, Kate, to the new campsite? The only trains are flat cars and box-cars filled with rough, sweaty laborers and their equipment. You can't ride with them."

"Why, we'll ride our horses!" the girl exclaimed, her

eyes shining. "A forty-mile ride will be a wonderful outing, the first real outing I've had since coming here. Old Clem can go with me to see that no Indians take my scalp. You yourself, I suppose, will have to ride on the train with your old laborers,—"

"Indeed I won't, Kate! If you travel on horse-back, you'll travel with me beside you, and Old Clem can ride with us, of course. We'll keep close to the tracks, with the work-trains always in sight, as they'll move slowly, and it's not likely the redskins will bother us at all,—

"Well, that's settled, young lady, and I'm glad of it. So now you can go and pack your things anyhow. But save out what you need for the day's ride to-morrow. The rest of it will be carried safely on one of the trains."

Meanwhile at the little clearing in the jack-pines, the Lone Ranger was busy removing the heads of the arrows he had filched from the Indian camp, and doing curious things with his knife, some thick paper, glue, and stout thread, to the contents of the package which Tonto had brought him early that morning. After their work was finished, he cut up a small roll of canvas into two parts, and fashioned them into crude, wide-mouthed sacks with straps to sling them from his shoulders. When he had padded the sacks well with soft grass and filled them with his altered arrows, they looked like big, clumsy quivers for ammunition such as had never been seen before.

"It's a mighty good thing," chuckled the Ranger as he filled the last sack and tested the length of its strap over his shoulder, "it's a mighty good thing that I learned how to handle a bow and arrow when I was a boy. It's been useful more than once, but never so useful as it's going to be to-night." He glanced up at the setting sun. "Silver Horse, it's about time we were getting started. Just a bite of supper, and then we'll hit back toward the camp to start our little game."

After a supper consisting of fried sage-chicken, camp

biscuits, and strong tea, Silver's master saddled him and mounted, with the strange canvas quivers hanging just below each elbow. Then, with plenty of time to spare, they ambled slowly toward camp through the gathering twilight. Had the Ranger guessed that Glencoe had set the time for action half an hour earlier than originally planned, Silver's gait would not have been the slow trot that he maintained until well within sight of the railroad.

It was the former's plan to lie in wait near the special train until the instant that the bribed engine-crew had disappeared,—then to slip into the cab before Glencoe could arrive, and to damage or remove certain necessary parts of the engine's more delicate machinery. This would prevent both the wreck and the hold-up, though the Ranger planned to gallop on to the scene of the proposed Indian ambush, prepared to spoil any rash attack by the drink-crazed Indians on the speeding pay-train.

However, as the dim outline of the camp and railroad embankment loomed into sight, a shock of alarm coursed through the Ranger's brain. *The special train was in motion.* Though its headlight had been extinguished, the moving shape of the engine and the single car was visible against the evening sky. The exhaust, slow and muffled as it was, could be heard as the train crept furtively from its siding on to the main track.

Silver bounded forward under the touch of his rider's heels, but even as he did so, the engine reached the main right-of-way, the sound of its exhaust quickened, a low rumbling filled the air as the train picked up speed under open throttle, and a tiny human figure dropped from the engine's cab, to disappear into the prairie dusk.

Grinding his teeth with anger and with fear for the lives threatened by a head-on collision between the pay-train and the runaway steel horse, the Lone Ranger urged his mount towards the limit of his magnificent speed. "Hi-Yo, Silver Horse," he gritted. "If you step in a

prairie-dog hole now, there'll be more besides you and me to suffer!"

But there was no cause for such worry,—no chance that the great brute whose whole life had been spent on the pathless desert, who had raced over far worse country than this and on far darker nights with the wild horses that he led and ruled,—there was no fear that Silver now would lose his sureness of foot or fail his rider. Slowly but surely he gained upon the snorting engine, which was an ancient wood-burning type with a top speed of twenty miles an hour. Slowly but surely he narrowed the angle between its course and his own, until he was racing parallel with the tracks and overtaking the man-made monster.

Hope lifted in the Ranger's heart. If he could force Silver close enough to the rocking engine so as to leap from the saddle into its steel cab, he could still save the situation by stopping the train completely. After that, the warning of the pay train would be a simple matter by planting a red flare some distance up the tracks.

But in the end, it was the half-wild stallion himself who made this plan impossible. Overtake the rushing train he would and did, but approach it closely he would not. The snort of the exhaust, the grinding of the iron wheels, the fiery glow coming from firebox and smoke-stack,—all caused a terror in the stallion's mighty breast, which nothing living could ever do. Thirty feet from the iron monster was the nearest he would go, and then only by the sharpest urging. The Ranger groaned bitterly as he realized this,—that the one safe, sure way of averting a wreck was closed to him. But not yet did he give up all hope. His mind, racing ahead over the few possibilities remaining, and the lessening minutes before the crash would be inevitable, made and cast aside one mad plan after another.

Suddenly his chin came up, his form straightened in

the saddle. Then, leaning forward, he touched the silver horse for the first time in his life with the spurs.

A shock seemed to strike the great beast's body. The stallion crouched in his stride, then leaped forward at a great speed that not even he had ever known. Darkness, sage-brush, hollows in the desert floor, all seemed smoothed to a perfect level beneath his flying feet. The runaway train dropped behind as if it were barely crawling. Three hundred yards, six hundred yards, a quarter of a mile stretched out between the horse of the desert and the steel horse of the rails. The Ranger, glancing over his shoulder, muttered fiercely, "We can do it, Silver Horse, we have lead enough now! If only that pay-train doesn't get here too soon,—"

Far down the track a single spark of light winked into being, disappeared, winked again, and grew into a steady gleaming eye. Headlight aglow, the pay-train was coming to its rendezvous. But hardly had its light appeared when the Ranger pulled Silver to a sliding, dusty stop, threw himself from the saddle, and snatching his rifle from its leather boot, leaped toward the tracks.

A desperate moment passed as the Ranger searched up and down the dim rails; then with a shout of relief he bounded toward a switch that led from the main track on to an old siding. There, jamming the muzzle of his rifle into the opening beside the steel "frog," he braced himself and pried with straining muscles. The frog, long disused, was rusty, clogged with sand. It did not budge. With breath whistling through his clenched teeth, the Ranger heaved again. The gun muzzle bent, snapped off. The broken end was jammed again into the frog. Another heave on the creaking stock,—and gratingly the frog moved into place.

The Ranger jumped back, sweat streaming down his face and soaking his clothing. But as he jumped, he noted with a quick satisfied glance, that the eastern end

of the old siding had been torn up, so that its track broke off abruptly into the desert sand.

An instant later, the runaway engine passed him, plunging its single car over the switch, onto the siding, and off the tracks, where it seemed to stumble, and then topple slowly on to its side, well away from the main track.

The Lone Ranger paused hardly an instant before racing back to where Silver awaited him, flanks still heaving after his desperate run. Once in the saddle, his rider urged him again at a swift canter down the track, while he made certain preparations involving the bow and the strangely-tipped arrows in their canvas quivers.

There would be no collision now, no halting of the pay-car in a jumbled pile of smashed steel and broken bodies, no massacre of the stunned guards, no easy looting of the train whose gleaming headlight showed brighter and nearer every second. But the Ranger's work was not yet done. The drink-mad savages might still attack, pouring bullets and arrows into the train windows and perhaps wounding the engine-crew with a lucky shot. That must be prevented if possible.

As the Ranger galloped onward through the night, his Indian bow ready-strung for use, he finished his preparations by drawing a cigar from his breastpocket and lighting it with an old-fashioned sulphur match, which even the wind of his passage could not blow out.

As he had suspected would happen, a pandemonium of yells and shouts broke out suddenly beside the oncoming train a quarter of a mile away. Even at that distance, the Lone Ranger could make out a dim blot of shadow keeping pace with the headlight, and knew it to be the mob of mounted savages. He pulled Silver's head sharply to the right, away from the tracks, drew the great horse down to a slow canter, and extracting a bulky-headed arrow from his right-hand quiver, touched

the middle section of it to his glowing cigar. The instant it sputtered, he nocked it to the bowstring and shot it in a long, descending curve. Striking the ground at a point not far from the rails, the "arrow" burst into flaming red light. A dozen more followed it, striking at various places in the path of the approaching raiders. Sometimes the red flare broke out in mid-air before it struck the earth, and there continued to light up the ground for many yards about.

The Ranger's next move was to ride still closer to the already alarmed raiders. Galloping parallel with them now, but still far enough out to be hidden by darkness, he began to draw arrows from the left-hand quiver, and after touching each fuse briefly to his glowing cigar tip, to shoot them over the heads of the bewildered savages. One after another, white lights exploded in ear-shattering thunder over their heads.

The short-fused dynamite fastened to the Ranger's arrowheads gave the effect of an artillery bombardment. Once or twice the improvised bombs exploded almost in the middle of the redskins' party. Horses leaped, bucked, and screamed. Their riders, as often as not, dropped rifle or hunting bow and rode madly, regardless of direction. Several redskins were thrown by their frantic beasts and left to make their way home on foot. In five minutes after its beginning, the drunken but dangerous raid on the pay-train had been demoralized, scattered, and changed into separate units of half-deafened, thoroughly scared Indians, whose one idea was to put more and more landscape between themselves and the train which they had hoped to rob. The three "white" outlaws who had led the raid were more angry than scared, to be sure, yet they had no choice except to follow their red friends' flight.

The pay-train rolled onward at half speed, its crew realizing the danger of halting when attacked unless

some obstacle thrown across the rails were barring the way. The fact that no such obstacle existed was revealed not only by the glow of the headlight but by the light of the still-burning flares which the Ranger had shot into the ground. When the last red flare was passed the puzzled but relieved engine-man re-opened his throttle to full speed, the payroll guards laid aside their rifles and stared at one another with bewildered expressions, the wheels beneath them beat a swifter, more confident rhythm upon the steel rails; and the pay-train, with only a few broken windows to show for its narrow escape, rushed safely toward its destination.

Somewhere out on the prairie, a dusty rider on a panting, sweat-streaked silver horse, gazed after the vanishing tail-light, and laughed silently. "Thanks to you, Silver Pony, there's another good job done, and done to the Queen's taste,—though probably Gunner Maxim & Company won't see it quite that way. Hi-Yo, Silver, away!"

X

THE AMBUSH

Pay-day began the next morning before breakfast, but not until the last laborer received his envelope at nine o'clock were Dave and Kate Stevens able to start on their forty-mile ride to the new camp-site. With competent foremen in charge of the gangs, Dave felt no hesitation in leaving them, especially as the "Bar and Billiard Palace," with its depleted store of liquor, had moved on ahead, and the thirsty crew would have no chance to spend their pay for drink that day. For the two young people this was to be a genuine holiday with no work or worries to mar their fun, and only the wild beauty of desert scenery to meet their eyes in every direction.

Kate rode her graceful little black mare, Dave a long-legged, raw-boned sorrel, while Old Clem brought up the rear on his aged but still sturdy "blue" roan, whom he called "January," and abused with a marvelous assortment of cuss-words on any and every occasion. The old plainsman refused to ride near Miss Kate, on the pretext that he could not cuss January properly if the girl were within hearing distance. "And he jest won't go at all unless he's properly cussed out!" Clem added, solemnly wiggling his whiskers.

For the first two hours Kate was so entranced by her first long ride into the virgin wilderness that she avoided all conversation of a serious nature. The different varieties of sage and cactus, a scurrying jack-rabbit, a hunting prairie-wolf, a patch of rising ground dark with the marching ranks of jack-pines and cottonwoods, an

eagle hurtling out of the blue sky to pounce on some unwary sage hen or cottontail,—all these fascinated her as much as the crowded sights and sounds of a city fascinate a countryman on his first visit. But as every mile revealed only more of the same wild life and rolling desert landscape, the sense of novelty was lost, and she felt suddenly glad of human companionship. Riding close to Dave Walton's stirrup, she began to question him about the latest excitement in the now-dismantled camp,—the strange and useless attack upon the pay-train the preceding night.

"There's something ridiculous about it, Dave," she remarked. "Why on earth should a little party of Indians, no more than fifty or so, according to the crew's report, attack a moving train with a clear track ahead of it and with no earthly chance of accomplishing anything more than to exchange a few bullets with the guards. And what under the sun was the meaning of all those red flares beside the track, and what looked like bombs exploding over the Indians' heads? Do you know what I really think, Dave? Either that whole train-crew made up the story for us, just as a practical joke, and broke a few windows to make it look like the real thing, or else were drunk and dreamed it all! You may say that I am wrong, but you'll have to prove it, young man!"

Dave shook his head soberly. "I wish I could believe you were right, Kate, and that it was all a dream or a joke, but there are a few things you don't know yet. You don't know, for instance, that the special train on which I was intending to send you back East was gone before the divisional inspectors had gotten aboard last night. It was found this morning, half-way between our camp and Windy Creek, overturned at some little distance from the main track. The engine crew were not aboard it, I made sure of that fact before we left camp this morning. The engine-man and fireman were in camp all last night,

drunk to the eye-brows. Now what do you make of that?"

Kate shook her pretty head, as a puzzled little frown appeared on her face. "I can't make head or tail of it, Dave," she replied, "unless it's just another practical joke. Probably someone saw the engine crew go away and started the train as a prank. He could have jumped off before it gained too much speed."

Dave laughed grimly. "Do you think it would have been a joke, Kate, if the runaway had collided head-on with the pay-train in the dark? I can't yet see why it didn't. The only thing that prevented a crash was the fact that *someone* had opened the switch on to an old abandoned siding; and that is where the runaway train went,—out on to the siding and off into the prairie, where it rolled over. If nobody had worked that switch the collision would have occurred less than a mile down-track from it, *exactly where that crowd of Indians tried to ambush the pay-train!*

"No, Kate, the whole business was planned and timed too perfectly to have even the appearance of a joke. The special train's crew were bribed to go away and get drunk. Their engine, with full steam up, was sent deliberately down-track to collide with the pay-train at a certain spot, where the Indians were waiting to loot the wreck. The Indians were doubtless bribed with several cases of liquor which were stolen from the bar on the night before. It all fits in. Just another attempt to slow up our job and demoralize the labor gangs!

"The real mystery is, *who switched off the runaway train?*"

Kate's breath came and went rapidly as she pictured the situation. "Haven't you—wasn't there any clue, Dave? I mean, didn't this mysterious switchman leave anything to tell who he might be?"

Dave smiled ruefully. "Yes, and no, Kate," he responded, reaching into his vest pocket. "This piece of

metal was found jammed against the switch. Take a look at it."

Kate Stevens turned the little, jagged steel cylinder over in her fingers. "It's the end of a rifle barrel," she murmured. "See, Dave, here is the front sight, badly jammed but recognizable!"

"Yes. We found the rest of the rifle nearby. Our thanks are obviously due to some unknown rider—"

"The Lone Ranger!" exclaimed Kate. "The nameless rider who performs wonders in the nick of time, and disappears without waiting for thanks! Dave, it couldn't have been anyone else!"

"By Jove, girl, you're right!" cried the young man. "I'd forgotten about the stuff Old Clem said he wanted yesterday morning, flares, dynamite, caps, and fuses. That's what threw such a holy terror into those Indians two minutes after they attacked the train. It's our Ranger friend, all right! We'll never find a way to thank him for all he's done."

The girl nodded, fingering the broken fragment of the Ranger's rifle barrel. "Do you mind if I keep this for a souvenir, Dave?"

"Why, of course, Kate! But do you know, what puzzles me is how he managed to explode dynamite bombs in the air over the heads of the savages. That is a trick I can't figure out!"

"Let's ask Old Clem!" Kate turned in her saddle to call to the old plainsman who had been traveling fifty yards or so behind, but instead of calling, she gave a little shriek of dismay.

"Dave! Look, Old Clem's horse is down! I just saw him stumble and roll over! Clem's pinned underneath—no, he isn't. He's pulled himself free! Dave, what on earth could have happened?"

The two young people turned their horses and raced back, just as a sharp report sounded, and from the pistol

in Clem's hand arose a thin blue plume of smoke. The fallen horse kicked once, then lay quiet, legs stiffly extended.

The old plainsman turned a sorry face toward his young companions. "Jest put his foot in a dratted prairie-dog's hole and broke a foreleg," he explained. "Pore old January! He's coyote-meat now, but he don't know nothin' about it. Well, I guess I'll travel the rest of the way on wheels, since it's more than twenty-five miles yet to the new camp, and I sure don't feel like walkin' that far. Just let me up behind your saddle, Dave, until we get back to the tracks, where I'll wait for the next train to pick me up."

"We'll wait with you, Clem," replied Kate, as the old man swung himself to the rump of Dave's raw-boned sorrel. "The trains are passing pretty often, and it won't be long before one comes. I'm so sorry, Clem—about old January!"

The accident threw a temporary cloud over the spirits of all three riders, but it had passed by the time Clem got aboard the train of flat cars and waved the young people goodbye.

Kate glanced up at the noonday sun and announced that she was growing hungry.

"We'll have a picnic all by ourselves," she laughed. "What fun! Not that I would have disliked to have Old Clem along with us, but now we'll be just like two children on a lark all by ourselves. Let *me* select the place, Dave, one of these little patches of pine woods where there's cool shade and perhaps some green grass to sit down on. We don't need to find a spring, because we have lots of water left in our canteens. And wait till you see the lunch I have put up in our saddle bags!"

Young Dave agreed, naturally, but it seemed a long time before Kate could decide on just the right pine grove for the noon rest.

When she did at last discover it, Dave was inclined to object because it was so far from the protecting railroad with its frequently passing work-trains. "We have to be careful about the Indians, Kate," he warned. "They're apt to be just where you don't expect to see them, and not so many weeks ago a party of them attacked armed laborers on the tracks in broad daylight. We're taking a risk as it is, riding only a few hundred yards from the rails. Now that clump of pines you've picked out is a full half mile away,—"

"Dave!" the girl's face flushed with anger. "You talk like an old woman. I never thought you were a coward! If I'm willing to take a chance on your old Indians, why should you be more afraid than a girl?"

Dave's anger and embarrassment were too suddenly overwhelming to let him reply. He had no time to reason out the motives of feminine disappointment and obstinacy; and pride would not let him make any more wise objections. Instead he turned his horse's head without a word, and followed Kate at a slow canter toward the distant trees.

The two had reached a point within a hundred yards of the pine grove, with Kate slightly in the lead and to one side, when a heavy blow smashed Dave's right leg against his horse's flank. Two sharp, cracking reports sounded from a distance, and the sorrel horse fell in mid-stride, hurling his rider violently to the ground. Falling on his shoulder, Dave somersaulted, sat up, and attempted to rise; but a white-hot pain stabbed through his right leg, and he fell again with a groan of despair. In that brief moment he had seen Kate's black mare racing headlong toward a rocky knoll just east of the pines, while a smartly dressed rider galloped from behind the rocks to intercept her flight.

Bullets kicking up tiny clouds of dust about him brought Dave's attention back to his own plight. His

dead horse lay only a few yards distant, and as fast as possible he crawled back to the shelter it afforded from the rifle-fire which came from the edge of the pine clump where Kate had insisted on making their picnic. As yet the attackers had not showed themselves.

One last glance Dave risked, only to see Kate Stevens and the man who had ridden out to meet her disappear over a rise of ground to the south. With a shock as terrible as that of a bullet, Dave recognized the strange rider. It was Glencoe, the Eastern dude, the smooth, fiendish plotter against human lives. And Glencoe's hand was extended, touching Kate's arm as they rode side by side like old friends!

Stunned by the realization that Kate was in Glencoe's power, willingly or unwillingly—either thought suggested new horrors—and sick with the agony of his shattered leg, the young man lay helpless for some moments before he could summon enough strength to draw his revolver and look toward the pine grove from which the rifle-fire had suddenly ceased. Three men had just issued from the trees on foot, and were advancing toward him with rifles ready. This Dave saw in one brief glimpse before he dropped back and waited, counting slowly up to fifty. His object was to lie completely hidden until the attackers had approached to within sure pistol range.

Again he raised his head, and fired three shots rapidly. Two of his enemies fired back on the instant, one of the rifle bullets cutting through his hair, the other striking his horseflesh shield with a heavy thud. The third rifleman dropped his weapon and clutched a bullet-pierced left hand, while his companions threw themselves prone on the ground and opened a steady fire.

The young engineer dropped back, re-loaded the empty chambers of his revolver, and was preparing to shoot it out against fatal odds, when a fresh burst of rifle-fire from behind caused him to spin around seeking

a new enemy. Instead of firing, however, he barely checked an impulse to rise and shout a welcome to the masked rider whose great silver mount was carrying him at furious speed toward the scene of action.

At full gallop the Lone Ranger fired his carbine again and again, and hearing no answer from his attackers Dave rose on hands and knees to look. The raiders were fleeing back to the woods while two hundred yards still separated them from the newcomer. A second man dropped his rifle, another's hat leaped suddenly from his head just as he ducked in among the sheltering trees. Then the Ranger's fire ceased.

Hoofs skidded to a dusty stop beside Dave's bullet-riddled horse. A tall, dark figure leaped to the ground, an arm was thrust gently under his head, warm water from a canteen dribbled into his parched mouth, and then, for what seemed a long time, the wounded man knew nothing more.

When young Dave Walton opened his eyes, two figures were bending over him, the Lone Ranger and the half-breed Tonto. His head pillowed on a saddle, and a blanket partly supported on two rifles shielded his face from the late afternoon sun. For a moment his mind wandered, trying to gather up the threads of meaning which would explain his situation. His right leg ached horribly and seemed unnaturally stiff. His eyes focused upon the faces of his two friends and their mounts, one silver, and one mouse-colored, standing nearby; and finally on the dead sorrel lying a little distance away. Then memory came back like a galvanic shock. He sat up and cried one word hoarsely, "Kate!"

The Lone Ranger sank to one knee, and supported Dave's shoulders with a strong arm. "Yes, where is she, son?" he asked gruffly. "You remember now. What happened? Where did she go? Never mind about those rats that I scared off. She wasn't with them because I

saw them ride away and scatter in three directions. Miss Kate wasn't with any of them."

A spasm of pain convulsed Dave's features for an instant. Then in a steady voice he said, "She rode away with Glencoe alone to the south. He was waiting for her and rode out to meet her from behind that rocky knoll to the east of the pine grove. She did not struggle and seemed to go with him quite willingly. That's all I know."

Tonto's deep grunt of surprise was seconded by the Ranger's unbelieving stare, against which Dave closed his eyes wearily. The Ranger's arm tightened on the young man's shoulders, and shook them roughly till Dave looked up in protest. The Ranger's voice held a grim impatience as he grated, "That isn't all you know, sonny. Sit up and tell me the whole story from start to finish. You had a shock, and you think you know the answer, but I swear you're going to be ashamed of it yet. Speak up!"

Sick with grief, revulsion, and pain of his wound, Dave blurted out the story from the time they had left Old Clem at the railroad. He told of Kate's insistence that *she* should pick the location for their mid-day halt, of her choosing this particular grove of pines in spite of his protests at its distance from the zone of comparative safety, of her daring him to follow her or be a coward. He told of his being shot without warning as they approached the trees, of Kate's sudden flight, *not* toward the pines, but eastward of them, and of Glencoe's meeting and riding off with her as if by previous arrangement. Then he sat back against the saddle and drew a hand across his eyes as if to wipe from them the whole bitter scene.

A few seconds passed in silence, and then Dave found the Lone Ranger's steel gray eyes gazing coldly into his own.

"Sonny," drawled the plainsman's level voice, "you're young, mighty young, and you're in love with that girl, or think you are. You've just seen something that gave you quite a jolt, considering your state of mind. If it weren't for that, I'd kick you right now, as I would kick a yapping yellow cur. You'll kick yourself harder, though, when you wake up and realize just how foolish all your suspicions are against Miss Kate. I'm maybe not old enough to be your daddy, but I'm old enough to know the character of a horse or a man or a woman, and I tell you now, that young woman is no more capable of leading anyone into a dirty trap than your own mother would be. She never went willingly with Glencoe, however it may have looked to you. He forced her to, somehow, and right now that girl is eating her heart out with grief because she thinks you're dead.

"You think that over, my boy, from now until I see you again, and I believe you will think of it so much that you forget your broken leg completely."

As he bit off the last word, the Ranger spun on his heel and strode to where Silver waited. Then vaulting into the saddle, he whirled his mount, and with his hearty "Hi-Yo, Silver" galloped swiftly out of sight on the trail of Glencoe and Kate Stevens.

Thoughts raced and tumbled through Dave Walton's dizzy brain as the Ranger's last words and sudden departure drove in upon his consciousness. *Could* it have been simple coincidence that Kate had insisted so stubbornly on this one spot for their picnic which turned out to be an ambush? Could it have been that her horse ran away out of control with the first rifle shots that struck down her companion? Could it have been mere chance that took the runaway black mare toward the exact spot where Glencoe waited apart from the three attackers? If so, why had she not struggled to escape the Easterner when he rode up beside her, instead of

galloping calmly over the hill, his hand touching her arm? That is how he had last seen the two, and it was a picture he would never forget. Could it have been due to some devilish trick of Glencoe's to make Kate appear his willing companion?

Yes, it could be so. The Ranger obviously thought so, but so many coincidences challenged all probability. Yet on the other hand, how could anything be more improbable, more impossible, than for Kate, whose family he had known for years, and whose sweet loyal-seeming personality had grown dear to him during recent days of grief and hardship and danger at the old camp,—how impossible that she, of all women should be in league with the murderous schemer, Glencoe.

It was unthinkable, and yet if it were not so, what must be Kate's real situation now? Kidnapped! Forced into the company of an unspeakable scoundrel whom she feared and hated! Carried heaven knew where into the howling desert, held captive by brutal men; for probably Gunner Maxim and his fellow-desperadoes would rejoin their master. She might be subjected to any outrage, to any danger, and killed when and if she became useless to her captors. Dave Walton groaned, overcome by the misery of his thoughts. He tried to turn over on his face, but was stopped short by the searing pain that lanced through his bandaged leg. He rolled, gasping, upon his back, and dropped into merciful semi-consciousness.

His next waking impression came along afterwards, when the noises of the bustling camp drifted through the canvas walls of the tent; and early morning light, shining through the tent doorway, showed him his own baggage and clothing surrounding his familiar camp bed. Tonto's dark, wrinkled face appeared in the doorway; and entering, the half-breed grunted a brief, "How you feel? Leg hurt?"

With a sickening rush, all the events leading up to his

unconsciousness from shock and loss of blood, filled Dave's mind. He tried to sit up, but the weakness of fever had paralyzed his muscles. His right leg was imprisoned in bandages and wooden splints.

"Has the Ranger reported yet?" he asked.

"Ugh! Ranger ride in five days ago for supplies. Then go look some more for Miss Kate. Glencoe lose 'um trail on rocky ground, so Ranger no find 'um yet!"

"Five days ago!" Dave whispered faintly. "How long have I been sick?"

"One week. You talk much sick-man talk and not know anybody. We tie you on to bed when you try get up and look for Miss Kate."

With a wrench, Dave turned his mind back to the immediate situation. What had happened to the railroad and the new camp while he had been raving in delirium? Had the work been slowed up, or stopped?

"Who's taken charge of the job all this time I've been out of my head, Tonto?" he groaned.

"Tim Holly, your gang-boss. He know what to do. He lay out work. Send telegrams in your name. All going right. No worry."

Dave sank back on his pillows with a sigh of relief. "Good old Tim! Might have known he wouldn't let me down. Send him to me now, Tonto, please."

XI

KIDNAPPED

When the first rifle shots burst out from the pine grove just ahead, Kate Stevens' black mare reared in nervous fright, seized the bit in her teeth, and plunged into a terrified run. Kate pulled, tugged desperately on the reins, but her strength was only a girl's, and her side-saddle offered no good purchase to brace her weight. As the mare swung left to the south, Kate was able to give one horrified glance back to the scene of the shooting, where Dave was dragging himself on hands and one knee back to his dead mount. The girl saw Glencoe ride out to intercept her, and felt a thrill of relief, believing the man planned to stop the runaway mare. But to her bewilderment, the Easterner merely spurred his long-legged bay into a neck-and-neck race, making no effort whatever to halt or check the black mare's course. Once Glencoe put out his hand, but only to touch Kate's arm and congratulate her mockingly on the "beautiful day you have picked out for our ride, Miss Kate!" A burst of rifle and revolver fire sounded faintly behind them, just as a low rise of ground cut off sight and sound of what was happening to the rear.

Only then did the Easterner seize Kate's bridle rein and pull the black mare down gradually to an easy lope. His smiling insolence told the girl more surely than words how thoroughly he was master of the situation. Breathless, weak from her struggle with the stubborn mare, half fainting with fear for Dave and the sense of her own helplessness, Kate offered no protest. Claspings the

saddle-horn with both hands to keep from falling, she bent her head and sobbed softly.

She had been riding for perhaps two hours, heedless of Glencoe's impudent chatter and even of the direction of which he was leading her, when a change in the country they were passing through brought her attention back to the present. The ground became rocky, and broken with low sandstone buttes. Queer, wind-sculptured shapes of sandstones reared themselves immediately ahead, while at some distance wooded hills rose up in a dark, tumbled mass. Glencoe pulled both horses to a stop, unrolled four burlap sacks from behind his saddle, cut each sack in two and proceeded to muffle the hoofs of both their horses.

"Iron-shod hoofs leave a plain trail for a good tracker in this sandstone country," he explained, "but this way they leave no more trail than a wolf. Another little trick I learned from our mutual friend, Gunner Maxim," he smiled.

The way Glencoe now took wandered for several miles among the low buttes and over the sand-chisled rocks in a clear attempt to lose his trail for any tracker who might follow with the idea of rescue. At the end of that time he removed the padding from the horses' hoofs and led the way straight for a deep notch in the wooded hills above them. The sun was setting before they reached the first narrow ravine, whose walls seemed to shut out the last glow of daylight.

There was, however, a trail of some sort which Glencoe was able to follow, and after a time it led up out of the ravine on to the shoulder of an adjacent hill. From here it continued two or three miles through thicker stands of pine and cottonwood, and ended, long after dark, in a little cup-like depression, where a deserted trapper's cabin stood closely hedged by trees. In front of the cabin blazed a large campfire, whose flames lighted

up the faces and disreputable figures of the three outlaws, Maxim, Murdock, and Gomez.

Glencoe greeted the trio cheerily as he dismounted. "Well boys, you got here ahead of me, as I thought you would. I suppose you finished off that Walton kid before you left him?"

There was an ugly question in the Easterner's words which chilled Kate's heart. But at Maxim's surly reply, her blood leaped again.

"Naw, he ain't dead yet, so far as I know,—all thanks to that guy with the silver horse. His rifle had a longer range than ours, and he drove us off. Smashed Gomez's rifle with one bullet, and took my hat off with another. That son-of-a-so-and-so ain't human! He's a devil, and so is that silver stud he rides!"

Glencoe cursed foully. "What sort of a story is it you're trying to tell me now? he snarled. "There was no one else in sight when I left you, and I caught sight of you three running out from the trees to finish off Walton at close range. You must have had plenty of time to get him first, even supposing your crazy tale about a newcomer shooting at you were true. Perhaps you stalled around waiting for Walton to wave a white flag or to tell you that he was dead or something?"

"Listen, Mr. Dude Glencoe!" Killer Murdock snapped. "Your sarcasm don't go down with us, see? It was just like the Gunner says. Walton had crawled behind his horse and was blazing away with his six gun, so we lay down. One of his lucky bullets had drilled my hand already. We was figgerin' to finish the kid off sooner or later with rifle-fire, when this same feller, who saved Walton from bein' lynched back at the old camp, comes ridin' up from the other side and starts to drop lead pills all around us. He had us out-ranged, and we just got back to the woods in time. Our hosses was tied out of sight, so we got to 'em and scattered. After that,

we each did what we could to cover our tracks, and headed back here as planned. So what kick have you got to make?"

Glencoe turned away with an oath of disgust, and lifted Kate Stevens from her saddle to the ground. "Go into the cabin," he ordered roughly. "It will be your home until further notice. You'll find what you need there to be comfortable, and you can even bar the door if that will make you feel better. But don't get the notion that you can run away. The rest of us will sleep in shelters close by, the horses will be guarded, and if you should try to escape on foot you'd never get anywhere. Good night!—Gomez, take care of the horses. Put the girl's saddle-bags down by the door."

As he moved over to the campfire, Kate stumbled toward the cabin, in which a single candle burned, stuck into the neck of a whiskey bottle. After barring the door with a heavy stick set for that purpose into rough sockets, her last conscious act was to drop on to the room's single bunk. There her exhaustion put an end to the fears which had dogged her through the day. She slept fully clothed, almost stirring.

Back at the fire, the three outlaws laughed coarsely. "So she can bar her door if that'll make her feel better! Haw, haw, haw! That door's so rotten a kid could push it down. And there's the window, too. Whenever any of us feel like it, we can—"

"Cut that, Gunner!" barked Glencoe. "She's valuable as a hostage, as I told you before; but the time may come when she'll be worth more to us if she's not harmed in any way. In *any* way! Does that penetrate your thick skulls?"

"To-morrow, Gomez, you will ride to whatever spot along this railroad will give you the best concealment, both going and coming, and you will take a note from me to Dave Walton. You will put it in a cleft stick close

beside the tracks where the next train crew that comes along will be bound to see it. Once they get a look at the address, they'll deliver it all right. Now, here's the point. In that note I shall tell Walton that his lady-friend's safety depends on two things:—One, his preventing any attempt to trail us; and Two, his slowing up the work on that railroad contract so that it can't be finished under the time-limit. If he disregards Number One, Kate Stevens will be killed outright. If he pushes the contract through on time, she'll be returned to him, *but as damaged goods*. If that warning doesn't do our little trick for us, nothing can. But I haven't the slightest fear that it won't work, knowing how Dave feels about the girl."

"Si," hissed little Gomez, his black eyes stabbing through the shadows at Glencoe, "maybe you have no fear, Meester Dude, but eef somet'ing go wrong wit' your fine plan, and we don't get our pay from your contractor, zen to whom ze senorita will she belong?"

"To no one of you, then or at any time," snapped Glencoe, "and why? because if anything *should* go wrong, we would have to run for it, and we *might* get into a tight place. In that case the girl is our last trump card, providing she is not harmed in any way. What I said about her being damaged goods in case Walton doesn't obey orders is all bluff, because if any of us should be caught, his life wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel if any damage came to the girl!

"Therefore no one except myself is to go into that cabin day or night, and no hand is to be laid on her unless she tries to run away. You've all got pay coming from me still, plenty of it, remember; and until you're paid off, I'm still your boss. So let's hear no more crazy talk from any of you!"

Glaring furiously at each of his uncouth companions in turn, Glencoe saw that he had won his point, for the

time being at least. Their eyes dropped before his stare, their dirty shoulders shrugged unwilling assent; and knowing the value of having the last word, the Easterner waited for no more conversation. Turning on his heel, he strode off into the darkness to make his own bed near the cabin's single door.

Sunlight, slanting through the tiny, unglazed window above her head, awakened Kate Stevens the next morning; but for some moments after opening her eyes, she could not recall her whereabouts. The moss-chinked walls, the strange bunk, the window, and a crude rustic table were the first things that puzzled her. Later, she made out a rough stone fireplace, a rustic bench, and shelves made of horizontal poles along another wall. But her eyes glanced from the barred door to the riding costume she still wore, realization brought her wide awake in an instant. She was for the present a helpless captive who had been treated with unexpected consideration. Glencoe had been relentless, but decent enough for a barefaced killer and kidnapper. How long her present situation might last, Kate could not even guess; but the idea was forming in her mind that her good treatment, if not her safety from actual harm, might depend largely on her own wits.

Glencoe she feared far less than she did the coarser-minded outlaws. To Glencoe she would look, then, for protection against the others. But if, to some extent, she could gain for herself whatever remnants of good will the three roughs still possessed, that might be extra insurance against future trouble. It was too early in the game to seek any means of actual escape. Rather, her immediate behavior must be planned carefully.

On the table was a wooden basin or large bowl, and on the earthen floor stood an ancient wooden bucket half full of water. Soap, a broken bit of mirror, a clean rag or two, and a small comb,—all these the girl discovered

nearby. And she felt they made a lucky beginning for her first day as a prisoner.

When Clarence knocked on the cabin door an hour later, it was a greatly changed Kate Stevens who opened it. Her long brown hair was drawn tightly back from forehead and temples, and tied in a hard, plain knot; her natty jacket was changed in her saddle-bags. A small mending-kit, produced from the same saddle-bags, had enabled her to re-make the long riding-skirt into a plain one, hanging straight down from hips to ankles. Even her smile, as she met the astonished man's gaze, was plain and business-like. It would be hard to say whether the dudish Easterner was more surprised or more shocked by the change in Kate's whole personality, of which her matter-of-fact smile was only a sample. The girl's fright and distress of the previous day had vanished. So had all trace of the coy loveliness or the roguish humor he had glimpsed on the rare occasions when he had seen her at the old railroad camp. *This* Kate Stevens might be a sober, straight-laced school-marm from his own New England,—clean, wholesome, but not beautiful, not even very attractive in her severe gray dress!

Glencoe started to speak, swallowed, and started again. "Er,—good morning, Miss Stevens. I—er—thought you might like a bit of breakfast. Pancakes, bacon, hot coffee,—they're all ready for you, if you'll step outside."

Confound it, thought the dude, why should she make him feel like a naughty schoolboy offering apologies? What was she smiling at, anyhow? A girl in her position ought to be frightened to tears, or at least nervous!

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Glencoe! It was very thoughtful of you to get my breakfast. But you needn't do it again. The only woman in camp ought to be the cook, you know."

Dumbly her captor led the way to the site of the last night's campfire, where cups and tin plates for two were laid out beside a steaming coffee-pot. There they sat down on a pair of blankets, the man disgustedly. He had kept his own breakfast waiting, to eat it in the company of a scared and pretty-faced girl! Now he was sitting down opposite a demure, straight-faced young woman who looked much older than her years. Even her voice was flat and cool, suited to the school-teacher she seemed to be.

During the meal Kate did practically all of the talking. It was, "Really, Mr. Glencoe these pancakes are terribly tough. You didn't mix the batter right, I'm afraid. And the bacon is *so* thick!

"Mr. Glencoe would you mind heating me a little water to dilute this coffee? It's strong enough to tan the inside of my stomach like leather. I'm afraid your mother never brought you up to be a cook.

"It was an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Glencoe, to find fresh water and soap, and even a mirror—or a piece of one, anyway—when I got up this morning. I didn't expect all those comforts of civilization out here in the howling wilderness!

"And where are the other men, Mr. Glencoe? I suppose they got their own breakfast, before they went out. Will they be back for dinner?"

Her companion grunted assent as he lit his cigar. "They'll be back if they have any luck hunting. There are some deer in these hills, and a few antelope. I sent them out for fresh meat."

"That was a *very* good idea, Mr. Glencoe and I am sure I shall enjoy cooking you all a first-class steak dinner. In fact, I intend to do all the cooking from now on, to pay for my board and shelter, so to speak. No, don't touch those dishes. I shall do the dishwashing, too! And,—er, by the way, I noticed last night that the

clothing of Mr. Maxim and his two friends was somewhat in need of repair. That's a rip in your coatsleeve, too, Mr. Glencoe. Oh, don't be ashamed of it! Since I'm going to be Camp Mother, as one might say, I shall mend clothes for everybody. There's nothing like keeping one's hands occupied.

"Now, if you'll be so kind as to bring in some firewood and collect some kindling for me, and bring all the supplies into the cabin, and carry some more water from wherever you get it, I will put the place in order, and be ready to cook dinner when the hunters come back. Hurry, now, Mr. Glencoe! It won't be very long now before noon, and we have a great deal to do."

Throughout the entire forenoon, Kate kept the bewildered Easterner busier than he had been for a long time, cutting extra firewood, making a broom for her out of small twigs cut the same length and tied firmly to a long stick, setting packages of bacon, flour, salt, sugar, and other groceries on the rough shelves, repairing the hinges of the rickety cabin door, and doing other chores much as if he were the hired man and she the owner of the establishment.

Whenever he protested, she simply ignored him, and repeated her request until he carried it out. When he sulked, she smiled at him with wise, school-teacher eyes, or stung him with a sharp jibe for "letting a woman do all the work, which a gentleman should do without being asked."

By the time that Maxim and Murdock arrived with a freshly killed antelope, Kate believed that she had their master pretty well trained. At least, whenever she spoke, he jumped to obey her request, having found that to be the easiest course.

"'Like master, like men'," she quoted to herself, and proceeded to whip the other two into line with even less difficulty than she expected. Only Gomez, when he

returned from his trip to the railroad with Glencoe's note, continued to eye her insolently as he chewed cold slices of antelope steak, and watched her picking up the remains of the others' meal. Kate guessed rightly that the low-browed Mexican would be the hardest of all to bring under petticoat rule; but as he offered her no insult, she refused to worry, though realizing he was the most dangerous of the four men.

A week passed by, much in the fashion of the first day. Glencoe, since he never left his prisoner out of sight except when she closed her door and barred herself in the cabin, was probably kept busier than any of the others, who were away from camp a considerable part of the time, either hunting or sent out on spying trips to the railroad. When they came back, they preferred to loaf about camp playing cards or talking together in low-voiced, desultory phrases. But Kate did not allow too much of that, knowing that the busier she kept them, the more they must respect her and remain to a large extent under her control.

She mended their torn clothes as she had promised, after making them wash the dirtiest garments themselves. She cooked their three meals a day, and good meals they were, considering the limited variety of the supplies on hand. By all this she managed to rise in their esteem, and avoided being looked upon as a useless female, even by the woman-despising Mexican, Gomez.

But more than by any other device, Kate kept the situation in control by finding necessary jobs for every man to do. Under her direction their crude brush-shelters took on the appearance almost of substantial camps, adequate to keep out wind and rain, and Kate saw to it that they were kept neat as well. The dirty blankets were washed (by their owners) and dried in the sun. After that, Kate kept them folded herself, just as she hung up discarded clothing on pegs, and kept the earthen floors free from litter.

She had repairs made to the roof of her own cabin, and stretched a square of thin muslin, cut from one of her own garments, over her single window to let in light but keep out prying glances when she desired privacy. She allowed the men to eat their meals in her cabin, but never to stay there after the meal was done, and her own meals she ate alone.

Thus, by using all her wits and strength of personality, she kept the only kind of discipline which could have protected her in that criminal company. It was not easy to meet all the little emergencies and situations which, if not properly handled, would have weakened or ruined her position beyond repair. But somehow she managed it, and sometimes dared to draw breath of hope that no emergency would rise in the near future that she could not handle.

She had given up any hope of immediate escape, but always there remained the hope of rescue by some miracle. And for some reason the word miracle always suggested to her mind the Lone Ranger.

XII

MAN HUNT

When the Lone Ranger left Dave Walton wounded but safe in the hands of Tonto, he lost little time in picking up the double trail left by Glencoe and his captive; but before he had reached the sandstone country, the sun had set, and he was obliged to make camp under the stars. In the morning he shot a jack-rabbit for breakfast, made a hurried meal of its flesh and strong, hot tea brewed over a sage-brush fire, and took up the trail before the sun was an hour above the eastern horizon.

This brought him in a very short time to the place where Glencoe had stopped to muffle the horses' feet in burlap, and from there on the trail was hopelessly lost along the rocks. Nothing without the nose of a wolf or a blood-hound could have followed tracks that left no impression on the stony ground.

Fully realizing his predicament, the Ranger resigned himself to the only remaining course, which was to search far and wide over a radius of perhaps twenty miles for further traces of the fugitives, who now might be still farther away, hiding among any of the countless hills and valleys that stretched in three directions farther than the eye could see. Except by the sheerest luck, the time spent on such a hunt would be long, if not completely fruitless. Wherefore the Ranger, instead of dashing off impulsively without plan or provisions, turned Silver's head back to the forty-mile-distant railroad camp to which Dave Walton had been carried the previous day.

Arriving after dark, he sought out Old Clem and

Tonto, and through these two secured not only extra food supplies, but also a rough map of the district where his search would lie, a map prepared some years before by scouting surveyors who were searching the best route for the new railroad. The ranges of hills were sketched in with their approximate height; and the lowlands, especially where there were streams, were carefully noted. Beyond this the map told little, but the Ranger believed it might be of use in suggesting a favorable location for a hideout. After all, the distance to which Kate had been taken was probably limited by one day's actual riding distance from the railroad; for at all costs Glencoe would wish to keep in touch with the progress of work on this last lap of the great engineering project. The note which he had dispatched to Dave Walton demanding that the work be slowed up as the price of Kate's safety, bore out this conclusion,—the note which, since Dave had not yet regained consciousness, had been secured and opened by Old Clem.

Late that night in Clem's darkened tent, the old man, Tonto, and the Lone Ranger had another council of war, the conclusion of which was that the first threat in Glencoe's note should be disregarded, as well as the second one. To be sure, a posse sent out to search the hills might bring the girl into genuine danger from her captors; but the Lone Ranger searching alone would not only have a better chance of success, but could keep himself out of sight as skillfully as any red savage of the plains.

"They aren't likely to take her life, in any case," the latter reasoned. "She's worth too much to them as a hostage to trade against their own dirty hides; and as far as her being harmed in any other way, the same argument holds. Besides, I have a lot of faith in that young woman's own cleverness in avoiding that kind of trouble.

"Anyhow I'm leaving you two here, for the time being, to nurse Dave Walton and see that his job is carried on so far as you can help him. Mind you, don't count too heavily on what I may be able to do about finding the hideout. But don't give up hope, either, or let Dave give up when he comes to his senses and remembers what's happened so far.

"Now I'll be starting out. Have to reach those foothills where Silver and I can hole up and sleep before day-break. Camping out in the prairie we might be seen by the very crowd we're hunting, not to mention Indians."

Shouldering his full saddle-bags, the Lone Ranger stepped out into the night, and a few minutes later was galloping in the direction of the hills directly south of the railroad camp. According to his reasoning that country should be searched first because it provided the nearest likely hideouts for any party which, like Glencoe's, must keep within reach of the new construction and spy on its progress.

Both horse and rider were weary when the night's journey ended in a thickly wooded draw at the base of the hills. There was ample concealment, and a trickle of water from a tiny spring. Grass grew between the tree-clumps, still green after the summer drouth which had burned the buffalo-feed brown and dry on the lower plain. Neither Silver nor his master could wish for more, at the moment; and after an hour of eating, both lay down to sleep through the morning hours.

They awoke long before sunset, and pushed deeper into the hill country until night again overtook them. No tracks of shod horses were found that afternoon. The Ranger hardly expected it, for the search had scarcely begun, and there could be no telling how long it might last. The map procured at camp would be of some help, but success would depend chiefly upon patient hunting, trained eyesight, and the unpredictable element of luck.

The next three days brought no definite results, except that they covered and eliminated most of the wooded hills immediately south of the railroad camp. Twice the Ranger found and followed single horse-tracks, probably made by members of Glencoe's gang on hunting or scouting trips. But the tracks led both times into rocky ground where they were lost. Probably the trick of muffling the iron-shod hoofs in sacking had been used again. The outlaws, if the tracks were theirs, had been very careful.

It was not until sundown of the fourth day that the Ranger, bearing farther eastward, came upon old tracks where two horses had traveled up a narrow ravine. A slight rainfall, drifting down from the higher country, had washed the hoof-prints away in places, but an expert glance told the lone man-hunter that the double trail might have made about the time of Kate's disappearance. The tracks were too dim at first to show whether they had been made by the shod horses or white riders or the bare-footed ponies of red savages. The answer to this question could be found only by further trailing.

The Lone Ranger hesitated. Would the old track be worth while to follow at all? More than likely it would peter out and vanish farther on. More than likely it had been made by a pair of roving Indians—young braves out for adventure and possible scalps. But the fading daylight made any decision unnecessary until morning. The great need now was for supper and a night's rest.

Before sun-up the Ranger had made up his mind. He would follow a queer hunch that this old horse-trail would bring luck. There was no particular reason for it, but the feeling would not go away; and as he followed the dim hoof-prints by the growing light of dawn, the hunch became stronger that *this was the actual trail of Glencoe and Kate Stevens*. A mile farther on, the guess became

almost a certainty, for in one spot the caulks of iron shoes had left a sharp impression in a patch of damp loam. At a farther point, where the stiff climbing required a rider to dismount and lead his horse, the print of a boot-heel seemed to shout its message to the Ranger's keen senses. For that boot-heel was too small to have belonged to a man! Kate Stevens had passed this way, a week ago!

Noon had not yet come before the Lone Ranger smelled wood-smoke, the sure sign of human presence. To gauge the direction of the wind that carried it, to tie his horse in a thick patch of young trees, to creep forward on foot with the stealth of a Sioux scout, occupied the space of a few moments only.

The smoke arose from a shallow, tree-shaded depression not three hundred paces distant; and as the Ranger crept closer, his ear caught a faint clattering, as of tinware, mingled with the low, musical sound of a voice. A woman's voice, humming a tune!

No other sounds of human origin rewarded the Ranger's patient listening as he lay motionless for a full ten minutes under a clump of bushes. A breeze was stirring in the tree-tops above him, a few birds called or chirruped to one another, a horse stamped its foot nearby and swished its tail to drive off flies. The cheerful little homelike noises which had first caught his attention continued. There was nothing else. Slowly and with more care than he had yet exercised, the Lone Ranger slid forward through the underbrush, until he saw before him a tiny clearing, a cabin with its door flung wide, and Kate Stevens moving to and fro within as she began preparations for the noon meal.

The Lone Ranger dared not signal her, for doubtless Glencoe or one of the gang was hanging about camp, if only to discourage any attempt on the girl's part to escape. This fact was followed by several other reali-

zations. If only his personal safety had been at stake, and the prize to be snatched from the outlaws had been anything but a young girl, the Ranger would probably have decided to do the job without assistance. Alone, he would not have doubted his ability to steal what he was after, and outdistance the outlaws' pursuit. But any rescue of Kate attempted single-handed would mean her exposure to the outlaws' bullets as soon as her absence was discovered and the chase began. Given a sufficient head-start, Silver's speed and power might even be trusted to bring a double burden safely across the fifty miles to the railroad. But a long head-start was just what could not be counted upon.

The Ranger saw that he must have help, plenty of help, if rescue were not to be as dangerous to Kate Stevens as her present captivity. Meantime if a message could be given her safely, it would be worthwhile as a support to her hope and courage. And what courage the child had! mused the Ranger. Her singing as she busied herself about housekeeping for these desperate, unprincipled men was pure bluff, pure courage, as he well understood. She should have the message if it were by any means possible, before he left the locality.

Snaking his way backwards to the place where he had hidden the silver stallion, the Lone Ranger planned carefully his next move. The bow and some of the arrows which he had lifted from the Indian tepee many days before had been taken with him on this stealthy search through the hill country. By skilled hands, an arrow could be fired at small game, such as rabbits, grouse, or prairie-chickens, with as sure success as any bullet, and the arrow made no noise to be carried to enemy ears. Arrows had supplied the Ranger with meat for the past week. Another one would carry a message to Kate.

Upon reaching his horse, he selected an arrow from the few that remained, removed its head, and replaced

the stone barb with a bullet split by his knife and tied quickly in place. Thus blunted, the missile could do no harm to anything it might strike. The Ranger then tore a leaf from a small notebook and wrote with a pencil, after which he bound the paper securely to the arrow shaft. With this and the strong bow, he repeated his stalk upon the cabin. It was as successful as the first, and the scene in the little clearing was the same. Nocking his arrow to the string, the Ranger waited till Kate had passed out of line with the open door, then promptly he released the blunted shaft. He waited until he saw Kate pick it up, discover the note, read it, and hastily throw the arrow into the open cooking fire that blazed upon the hearth. He had started to crawl backwards through the underbrush, when a sound of approaching hoofs from behind warned him of a genuine danger. Flattening his body to the ground, he waited, motionless, and, he hoped, invisible to any one who did not actually stumble upon him.

But this very thing almost happened. The undergrowth was thick enough to afford good, but by no means perfect, concealment. If the approaching men (there were evidently two of them with their horses) happened to see a patch of clothing or an outstretched foot, he knew that the game would be up, with his only chance of escape resting on his quickness with the silver-mounted forty-fives now gripped in his two hands. The approaching men were almost upon him.

But again, Providence or luck weighted the scales. The newcomers turned a little to one side, avoiding the thick bushes; and the Ranger, peeping cautiously through them, saw Gomez and Maxim ride past almost within arm's length, the divided carcass of a deer lashed to their saddles.

The Lone Ranger waited for another ten minutes to make safety doubly sure. Then he retreated with the

silence possible only to a skilled stalker, and returned quickly to his horse. Only then did he permit himself a deep breath of relief before swinging astride the stallion's back.

"Silver Horse", he muttered, "this neighborhood is too thickly populated for you and me. If we want to get that girl out of here safe and sound, it's plumb up to us to clear out before those two-legged lobos get our scent or find out what we've been up to!"

Since it was still early in the day, the Ranger did not dare to begin immediately his journey across the open country toward the railroad; so upon reaching the last fringe of woods he unsaddled, hobbled Silver to graze on the scanty feed that grew among the trees, and satisfied himself with a cold meal of left-overs from his breakfast of rabbit-meat and biscuits. This finished, he stretched out to doze and wait for sunset.

Before midnight, he was giving whispered orders to Old Clem in the latter's tent at the railroad camp.

"First get me two buckets of water for my horse. He's traveled more than fifty miles to-day, and he'll have to travel fifty more between now and breakfast. And don't forget to bring eight quarts of oats or corn or whatever grain you can get hold of." The Ranger's whispered words were bitten off sharply as they drove home the need for haste.

"I need Tonto and one other man besides yourself, Clem, somebody who is not afraid of a hard ride and maybe some quick shooting at the end of it; somebody who can absolutely trust. Who have you got in mind that answers to that description?"

"There's Frank MacDowell," replied the old man, twisting his whiskers into a ball with nervous hands. "Frank's one of the foremen we used in that raid on Gunner Maxim & Company at the bridge. He can sit a horse after a fashion, and shoot pretty good with a rifle,

and you wouldn't find another man in camp who's better at a rough-and-tumble scrap. Besides, he thinks the world and all of Miss Kate and Dave."

"Good! He'll do! You get him and Tonto here in a hurry with their horses, Clem, and tell them to bring their rifles. Why don't you get started? There's no time to lose."

The old timer hesitated at the tent door, shaking his head. "It jest ain't no way possible," he whispered hoarsely. "It jest ain't."

"What 'ain't' possible, you old fool?" the Ranger's voice was harsh.

"It ain't possible to ride *any* hoss a hundred miles in twenty-four hours, the way you're planning to do, not even if he *is* that silver stud of yours, and half-catamount at that!"

The Ranger chuckled in the darkness of the tent. "You don't know him yet, Clem. I admit it would be impossible for any other horse, but not for Silver. Besides, if we get started now, we may get a chance to rest a couple of hours before closing in on Glencoe's camp. Now you hustle and see how quick you can get back here with feed and water."

Within the hour, four mounted men stole out of camp into the moonlit prairie. Three of them sat in their saddles as horsemen born and bred; the fourth, a bulky figure astride a heavy-muscle beast, was clearly more accustomed to traveling on foot than on horseback. At the steady, mile-eating trot which the four maintained this man bumped solidly on his saddle with every step. An observer with a horseman's eye would have predicted that the rider would be very sore and his horse very tired before the journey's end. Already the man was giving voice to his discomfort in warm, Irish brogue.

"'Tis not sorry I'll be, bedad, when this trip is over," he complained, "and I wouldn't care to bet whether it

will be me or this poor beast I'm ridin' that'll have the most aches in his bones and skin off his back-side by daylight. You'd never find me in this predicament if 'twere anybody but Miss Kate that we was goin' to rescue, the saints preserve her!"

"You don't fool me, Frank MacDowell. Consarn it, you'd have had my scalp if I'd left you out of the party, and danged well I know it," giggled Old Clem. "Anyhow, you'll forget your sore spots long before sun-up. They'll be all numb and you won't feel a thing until you get a chance to stop and rest. Then we'll hear some more Irish lamentations and cuss-words. You ought to have tied a pillow to your pants, Frank. What I really pity is the pore critter that's carryin' you. If his back ain't broke before we git back, he's indestructible!"

"Maybe we don't get back. Maybe Maxim and other killers shoot too straight," contributed Tonto with one of his rare grins.

"Which would be an easy way out of it, any rate," moaned the Irishman, as another bump jarred his teeth. "But that'll be enough of yer evil suggestions, ye black-faced imp of Satan! We've got to think of Miss Kate before ourselves, begorra."

The Lone Ranger remained silent, seeming to float ahead of his companions like a dim ghost through the moon-washed prairie night, which made Silver's pale coat all but invisible. He allowed the others to joke and talk as they pleased, since there was little chance of any ears but those of a hunting coyote overhearing them, and their bantering kept their minds away from the haunting fear that their ride might be after all in vain.

His own mind fastened itself resolutely on the details of the coming action. He tried to forsee every possibility, every emergency that might arise when the outlaws should discover themselves surrounded, but with the girl still in their power. When that time came, a rash motion

or a wrong word might change the rescue into a tragedy. Much as he disliked to admit that chance, the Ranger forced himself to do so. Kate Stevens's safety must come before anything else.

XIII

PURSUIT

That morning Kate arose as usual an hour after daybreak. Having finished her toilet, she unbarred and threw open the cabin door, calling to the men that breakfast would be ready shortly. Then, poking aside the dead embers of last night's fire she proceeded to kindle a new one with dried leaves and chips; and in the semi-darkness of the deep fireplace she overlooked something, whose discovery by her would have greatly changed the course of events within the next few hours.

Half an hour later the four men trooped into the cabin at her call, and sat down to the morning meal. It was almost the same as every breakfast they had eaten since coming to the place, the groceries available consisting only of flour, tea, and salt. The bacon was missing, having been used up two days before and in its place was fried venison steak. Biscuits, mixed with sour dough and baked before the fireplace, completed the scanty menu. The supply of these two items was ample, however, and the men fed heartily, washing down their food with strong tea. Glencoe, finishing before the others, arose and walked over to the fireplace, where he stood smoking and gazing moodily at the hearth. A number of things had been worrying him lately,—the uninterrupted progress of the railroad job, contrary to his demands, the diminishing store of camp supplies, and especially Kate's new manner during the past twenty-four hours. She had seemed to the sensitive Easterner to be suppressing a strange excitement, a half-fearful eagerness which he could by no means account for, unless,—

Suddenly he stooped and thrust his fingers into a little pile of dead embers near the smoldering breakfast-fire,

drew from this some object at which he stared intently for a moment, then sprang to his feet with a curse. Seizing the broom, he raked the whole contents of the fireplace out on to the earthen floor, and scattered it in a thin layer of burning coals and ashes. For a full minute he hunted through the smoking debris, then with a cry of sudden discovery he picked up a small lead-colored particle and dropped it into the water bucket to cool. When he fished it out of the water, his manner changed to cold, white fury under Kate's terrified gaze and the amazed stares of the three outlaws.

Slowly Glencoe extended his open palm toward the girl, revealing two objects—the notched and feathered end of an Indian arrow, and the split forty-five-caliber bullet which had tipped the shaft that had carried the Lone Ranger's message into the cabin. So great was Glencoe's rage and chagrin that he could hardly speak; but when he did, his choked voice was terrible.

"So they have found you! They got a message to you yesterday, tied to this arrow! Oh, I should have known from the way you acted, you white-faced little fool! I told them what would happen if they sent anyone to find you,—told them it was as much as your life was worth—"

"Hey, what the devil?" roared Gunner Maxim, as he and the other two lurched to their feet. "She's got a message from the outside? What was it? When did she get it? Tell us what it's all about, Mr. Dude, if you know what's good for you!"

The hoarse mutterings of Murdock and Gomez seconded Maxim's demand. Glencoe faced them slowly, then spun about and seized Kate's shoulder with a crushing grip.

"Where's that note, girl? Don't say you destroyed it! Give it to me this instant, or I'll take it if I have to strip every rag from your body!"

Kate swayed, her eyes closing, her breath coming in terrified gasps. With shaking fingers she fumbled in the bosom of her shirt and pulled forth the tiny sheet of paper which bore the Lone Ranger's penciled note. Glencoe tore it from her hand, glanced through it, and read aloud:

"'Keep up your spirits, Miss Stevens, and keep up your bluff. One more day ought to see you safe out of this.'"

The eyes of all four men blazed like those of trapped beasts, blazed at the white helpless girl who leaned against the table in wordless fright.

"You got this note yesterday," Glencoe barked. "Yesterday morning because you were acting queer from dinner-time on. And one day from then brings us pretty close to *now*. Isn't that right? That means—" He whirled upon the cursing trio beside the table. "That means we clear out of here at once. Get the horses saddled, mine and the black mare first. Leave everything as it is. See that your guns are ready before you scatter. I'll take the girl one way, and you go your own, but meet us where I told you when you're sure they've lost your trail. Now move!"

As the three men ran from the cabin to obey Glencoe's furious orders, the latter reached forward and slapped the girl heavily on the face. "Wake up, you," he grated. "Don't faint, or I'll strap you to your saddle and take you anyway. Put these things into your saddle-bags quick" (he swept flour, salt, and tea from the cabin shelves) "and then join me outside. If you make me wait half a minute, you'll wish I'd killed you."

The cabin door banged shut as Glencoe raced toward his own shelter outside, shouting to his men to hurry with their horses. Indoors, the girl offered up one brief, desperate prayer.

The Lone Ranger and his three companions halted their weary mounts in the little clump of saplings where Silver had been tied the day before, and dismounted in silence. Even whispering was avoided. From now on until the final showdown, noiseless stalking was to occupy their whole attention. The cabin clearing was to be surrounded, and approached from four sides at once, until within sight. After that, developments must fit the circumstances they found. Warily the four set out on foot, crouching low in the undergrowth. The faint smell of wood smoke from the cabin became stronger.

Suddenly a low drumming of hoofs and a few muffled shouts came from the direction of the clearing ahead. The Lone Ranger rose to his full height, and listened intently for the space of half a dozen heart beats. Then his hands shot down to the gun-butts at his thighs, and he charged forward. The others followed, regardless now of noise. Their feet slipped, stumbled over dead branches and rotting logs; low bushes snatched at their legs, higher ones whipped at their faces. Only speed counted now.

In a scattering line they broke over the edge of the hollow where the cabin stood, smoke still drifting through its open door, and there they stopped. Then ahead of his friends the Ranger leaped to the door of the empty shack, stepped inside, and was out again almost in the same motion.

"Back to the horses, boys!" he called. "It'll be a chase, now, maybe a long one, but God help us to win it!"

Led by Tonto's wiry legs, the disappointed men plunged back toward their weary horses, not sparing breath even for cursing their luck. Once mounted, the Ranger swung into the lead.

"Look for the trail of two horses traveling together," he shouted, as the other riders dispersed through the trees. "That'll be Miss Kate and Glencoe. The others will

scatter,—no need of trailing them. Only Miss Kate matters now!"

Within five minutes the Lone Ranger rallied his companions with another shout. "Double tracks! This way, boys! They're heading down toward the prairie. Just follow me!"

They followed him, keeping their direction, guided partly by shouts and partly by the sound of Silver's crashing flight through the trees. Soon they were strung out in single file, with Frank MacDowell bumping far behind on his heavy horse. The trail led always down-hill toward the northeast, striking finally the narrow ravine through which Kate and Glencoe had first entered the hills days before. Here some attempt had been made by the fugitives to lose their tracks in patches of stony rubble left by spring freshets, and this slight delay gave the Ranger's companions a chance to catch up with him.

Yet hardly had the last man come within earshot when the Ranger's cry rang out, "Down the ravine! Still a double trail! They'll be out in the open now."

With Silver ever in the lead, they cleared the last scattered growth of trees, and saw the open prairie stretching on three sides before them; while half a mile to the east, two tiny dots surrounded by a moving dust cloud showed the hunters their quarry. And striking their spurs deep into the flanks of their panting beasts, they strung out again in single file, hoping desperately against hope to overtake the fresher horses ahead. Gradually all four pursuers realized, however, that their only real hope lay in the miraculous speed and endurance of the Ranger's great stallion. With more than a hundred miles covered during the past twenty-four hours, and with only brief rests and scanty feed behind him, Silver was nevertheless surely overtaking the two fresher horses of the fugitives.

Yard by yard he cut down the distance, though near-exhaustion began to show in the blood-shot rims of his

eyes, and in the deep, painful heaving of his flanks. His stride was shorter, less certain than before, his neck was stretched low, and the rhythm of his laboring muscles grew perceptibly less smooth. But still he gained!

Suddenly the two dust-dimmed figures he was overtaking slowed down, stopped, and whirled, the riders dismounting at the same moment and on the farther side of their beasts. Quickly the Ranger pulled on Silver's bit, drawing the gallant horse to a stop. The chase was over. From now on, bullets would fly, bullets,—

The Ranger groaned. *Two rifles had spoken from behind the horse-flesh breastworks of the enemy. They could not have been fired by Glencoe and Kate.* The Ranger had barely sensed while pursuing them that both riders looked like men, but hope had supported his belief that one must be a girl,—the girl in whose rescue he had failed utterly, and whose danger was now worse than ever.

But now, no time for regrets. Once more his master touched Silver with the spurs, and once more the gallant horse rocked forward at a stumbling gallop, his strength all but spent.

The Ranger swerved sharply and stopped at a hundred yards from the outlaws' rifles. A bullet creased Silver's dappled rump. Another tugged at his master's sleeve. Jerking his rifle from the saddle scabbard, the Lone Ranger leaped to the ground and dodged still nearer, drawing to himself bullets that were out of line with the spot where Silver stood. Then, throwing himself at full length on the ground, the deadliest marksman of the plains opened fire.

His first two bullets swiftly and mercifully killed the outlaws' horses. They dropped with scarcely a quiver before the men standing behind them had a chance to crouch; and these latter, knowing that the game was up, suddenly raised empty hands above their heads. Their

heads. Their faces, clearly revealed now, were those of Maxim and Killer Murdock.

Still prone on the ground, his rifle trained unwaveringly at their belt-level, the Ranger barked his orders. "Unbuckle your gun belts! Then keep your hands up and walk over here. And hurry!"

Hoofs thudded in the dust behind him as Old Clem and Tonto galloped up to their leader, the former cursing steadily in a shrill monotone. Tonto's Indian blood kept him from expressing his feelings, but his black eyes glittered murderously. Last of all came Frank MacDowell, doggedly bumping along on his saddle-sore beast. The big Irishman's face was the color of red brick, both his big fists were clenched with fury, and he waved them in the air to punctuate the threats that poured from his mouth.

"Ye double-dyed rascals," he howled at the frightened outlaws. "If I'm not the first man to pull on the rope that hangs yez higher than Haman, it will be because Hivven has forgotten me. Where did that black imp Glencoe take the por colleen?" Throwing himself from his horse, the big man seized an outlaw's unshaven throat in each hand. "Answer me, ye bloody scuts, before I rip out yer tongues. Answer me! Where's the girl?" For the moment Frank MacDowell's fear and anger on Kate's account had robbed him of all reason. It was not until fingers of steely strength bit into his own and disengaged them from his staggering victims, that Frank remembered even the existence of his companions.

Hard and cutting as a diamond, the Ranger's voice took command. "Drop it, Frank! Clem, get their lariats and tie them up. You two, Maxim and Murdock, lie down on your faces, hands behind you. Tonto, go over to those dead horses and get their guns, likewise their water bottles. No more talk now till we get back to the woods."

Slowly and on foot the four drove their captives back

over the ground their flight had covered. The outlaws' mounts were dead; their pursuers' horses, including Silver, were too exhausted to carry weight. Both men and beasts plodded along with an air of deepest dejection, though with varying emotions. Every man was oppressed in his own way by the sense of bitter failure, for only the horses had won their goal,—too tired, poor brutes, to care, even if they had known what it was all about.

When at last a screening stand of cottonwoods was reached and the Lone Ranger called a halt, his first orders were to care for the non-human members of the party. "Clem, Tonto, take off your hats. Empty all canteens into them, and give the horses a drink. They've earned it and we haven't."

He turned to the still glowering Irishman. "Frank," he asked in a dead-flat tone, "do you know how to tie a hangman's knot?"

The big man's teeth gleamed whitely. "Indade I do, and 'tis a great pleasure you're givin' me by suggestin' it. I'll bory yer lasso, since I brought none with me, and the other thief will be hanged by his own. I'll pick out the tree, too, if ye don't mind; there's one with a fine lookin' limb jist over to the left. I'll have everythin' ready in two shakes of a lamb's tail, and the world will be rid of a couple of black scoundrels, Hivven be praised!"

Tough though they were, the two outlaws showed in their faces new lines of fear. Though each had sent many a man screaming to his death with hot lead in his vitals, and though each knew his end would probably be violent in any case, they kept control with difficulty as the two nooses were fashioned and the lariat end tossed over the fatal limb.

As Tonto motioned them to their feet, they hesitated at beginning their last walk to the tree. Maxim's tight lips writhed apart in a ghastly snarl.

"Listen smart guy," he jerked out, facing the Lone

Ranger. "You're heading this party. Can't we make some sort of trade?"

Killer Murdock spat scornfully into the dust. "Are you plumb crazy, Maxim, or just plain scared? We ain't in no position to make a trade, so keep shut and take your medicine instead of playin' the cry-baby!"

"Good advice," chuckled Old Clem. "You got a man's guts, Murdock, even if you have a reptile's soul. Now git goin' over to that tree and don't keep us waitin'. The rest of us want a drink, and it'll be a long mile before we find it. Now git!" He gave Maxim's shoulder a heavy push, which almost crumpled the coward's shaking knees.

The Lone Ranger kept a bitter, uncompromising silence as the two captives walked toward the place of execution. He said no word while MacDowell slipped the nooses over their heads, merely motioning with his hand for Tonto and Clem to seize hold of one rope together. The Irishman's brawny weight would be sufficient to pull on the other. Only at the last moment he stepped forward and spoke to the condemned men.

"If it should happen that you remember any prayers that you want to say, now is your time. Or maybe you have some message to leave. If so, we'll see it's delivered if we can. Speak up!"

Murdock merely spat again into the dust, a defiance more expressive than words. The man had courage of a brute kind. He would swing without a word, without a sign of weakening.

But cold sweat beaded on Maxim's forehead. The Gunner, more clever and more imaginative than his fellow captive, was weakening visibly. He licked his lips, and in stark terror stared out of his dust-rimmed eyes.

"Maybe," he choked, "maybe we can still make a trade. There's things you want to know bad, things you can't know unless I tell them. Glencoe—"

"What about Glencoe?" barked the Ranger, betraying

an eagerness which made the clever outlaw draw his first real breath of hope.

"Tell me first what good it'll do me if I do talk. You know damned well I won't talk for nothing." He managed a twisted leer of bravado.

Silence descended on the tense group while the Ranger's eyes drilled into the Gunner's brain. When he spoke finally, it seemed to be more an answer to MacDowell's growl of protest than to the outlaw's question.

"Depend on what you can tell, that we can use. We make no promises,—yet. You were saying something about Glencoe?"

Maxim's confidence was shaken, but he licked his lips again and stood straighter.

"It's this way," he began. "I admit that we three fellers was concerned in a lot of trouble you had at the old camp. That raid on the pay-train, which didn't pan out. We was with that bunch, dressed up like Injuns—"

"I know that," snapped the Ranger. "I also know that Glencoe planned that stunt and started the special train down to meet the pay-train and wreck it. Tell us something more,—or wait! I'll ask questions, now.

"What bout the poisoning of Dave Walton's father? How did you give him the first dose?"

"I didn't do it!" gasped Maxim. "One-legged Pete gave him that in his supper."

"And the second dose?"

"The devil! How did you know? It was Pete that give him that, too, in pills."

"And you knifed Pete? And later, Foreman Murphy?"

Maxim nodded sullenly. "Yeah, Glencoe paid me for that."

"Why?" The word cracked like a pistol shot.

Gunner Maxim grinned for the first time, regardless of

the noose around his throat. "I asked him about that. Perhaps you know what he said, too?"

"As a matter of fact, I do, so we'll skip that until you write out a full statement. Shut up!"—as Maxim, with new hope in his eyes, opened his mouth to bargain. "All right, Maxim, I'll promise you this; if you'll sign right now a duplicate statement of your guilt as the paid tool of Glencoe in every last one of these crimes, I'll guarantee to have you sent back to the military authorities of this territory for trial. And that goes for Murdock too, when he signs with you. Take your choice between that and swinging now from this limb. You're not gettin' much for your trade, because you'll be hanged in the end, anyhow. Do you take it or leave it?"

"I'll take it. I ain't got no choice. How about you, Murdock?"

The Killer nodded silently.

Despite the angry objections of MacDowell and Old Clem, the nooses were removed, and half an hour later the prisoners' right hands were freed to sign the statement and copy, penciled in the Ranger's notebook, after which the others signed their names as witnesses to both documents. Then the prisoners were bound again, and the Ranger gave final orders.

"Boys," he said slowly, as weariness seemed to drop about him like a dark cloud, "that'll be about all, as far as this party goes. You three will take those two skunks back to camp as soon as you comfortably can. There'll be no hurry, but see that the prisoners get there safe and well guarded while in camp. You'll have to keep my promises to them. We'll travel together now till we find water,—it can't be more than three or four miles away,—and then we'll part company."

The four moved on foot, still sparing their mounts and driving their captives ahead of them. But except for the latter, no man's spirits rose out of the slough of despond

where their failure to rescue Kate Stevens had left them. Indeed, they avoided that subject as far as possible in their scanty conversation.

"You're follerin' the trail alone, friend?" queried Old Clem.

The Ranger's answer was brief. "As soon as Silver and I get a night's rest. It's likely to be a long hunt."

"How about grub? We left camp riding light, and you ain't got scarcely a meal of biscuit flour in your saddle bags."

The Ranger smiled for the first time that day. "I and that silver horse are pretty much alike in one way," he replied. "We've both spent a good part of our lives taking things as they come, and living off the country where we happen to find ourselves. You needn't worry about us.

"When you get back," he went on, "your job will be to see that young Dave doesn't get too desperate or lose hope. And I'm afraid you're going to have your hands full, if I know that boy! Right this minute I'll bet he's thinking about taking a horse and starting out to hunt for the girl on his own hook, regardless of his broken leg. It'll be your worry to keep him from doing just that."

XIV

THE LONG TRAIL

A sadly changed man, Dave Walton was hobbling about camp on crutches, inspecting new equipment for the steadily growing road of steel, when five grim and dirty men rode in. Two of them were mounted behind saddles of Clem and Tonto, their feet tied to the saddle-girths. Frank MacDowell rode doggedly behind, carrying the weapons of all four riders besides his own. His job throughout the trip back had been to see that no tricks were played, no weapons handled by the two outlaws. His responsibility was over now, for the crowd of curious laborers which surrounded the party made escape impossible for the prisoners. It also hid the true situation from Dave until the whole group had approached within speaking distance.

But the onlookers stepped aside, awed by the white look on the young engineer's face as he limped forward. The wasting of his fever, the anxiety that had tormented him, had left Dave Walton a seeming cadaver, glaring terribly through a death-mask of his former features. Approaching Old Clem without change of expression, he whispered one question: "Kate?"

The effect upon the old timer was to bring his keen wits and fine sensibilities into full play on the instant. Without answering Dave's question, he slid quickly from his saddle and grasped the boy's shoulders with steady hands.

"She's safe and sound, so far as I know, sonny, so git a-holt of yourself," he spoke quietly. "The story's got to

keep till we git these two reptiles locked up and guarded. You know best whar they ought to be put, so give orders and then we'll adjourn to yore tent."

The need to think and to give orders snapped Dave out of his trance, as Old Clem had intended. Spinning around on his crutches, he shot words at Tim Holley, who had just come up on the run. "Take charge of these prisoners, Tim. Put them in the new store house after you've emptied it of everything they might lay their hands on. Put a guard of six men with rifles around the building, then untie these two in the storeroom and feed them. I'll give further instructions later; meantime you're accountable for their safety. That's all."

As Holley turned to obey, however, Old Clem called out. "Jest a minute, Tim, if you don't mind! We're goin' to Dave's tent now for a pow-wow, Frank, Tonto and me. But we ain't eat nothin' substantial for almost two days, and we got more alkali dust in our throats than we can wash away in a week, so please see if there ain't somethin' you can do about it."

Tim Holley found his voice. "Sure, Clem, I'll see to it that yez have the finest meal the cook can scare up in the next twenty minutes, trust me!"

When the four were seated in the Engineer's Tent, Tonto and Frank MacDowell waited, giving the old plainsman the floor, while Dave controlled his impatience. Clem looked young Dave over sternly with his shrewd, desert-bleached old eyes.

"You've been playing the fool, boy, while we've been gone. I knowed you would. Bad enough for you to be walkin' around camp while you're jest up from a fever, with your smashed leg and all; but that was necessary, I reckon. The rest of it was plain dumb foolishness,—worryin' and eatin' your heart out with gosh-awful imaginin's about what might happen but didn't. And wust of all, blamin' yourself. Now I'm back with you I'm

goin' to be your nurse and give you orders. The fust one is: don't worry no more.

Dave's hand was steadier, but his eyes continued to burn their question into Clem's face.

"Up till three days ago," stated the old man, wiping his whiskers with a gharled hand, "Miss Kate hadn't taken no harm whatsoever. Your Ranger friend sneaked up on the hideout and heard her singin' as she was gettin' dinner. That's proof she had no real trouble. The Ranger got a message to her tied on to a blunted arrow. He saw her read it and destroy the arrow, and then he come high-tailin' back here to collect us and try a rescue in which Miss Kate wouldn't get hurt."

Dave nodded, relaxing partly in his chair. "Yes, he showed good judgement. But why didn't you tell me when you left?"

"In the first place," replied Clem, "it would have delayed us considerable, explainin' everything. And in the second place it wouldn't have done no good." He chuckled mischievously, clawing at the whiskery tangle on his chin. "We'd have had to find three more men to hold you back from gittin' another horse and follerin' us!"

"'Tis a fact, bedad," remarked Frank MacDowell, his blue eyes twinkling. "Ye should thank the old felly, Dave, instead of glowerin' like Maggie Murphy's cat when the dog left her up a tree she couldn't climb down."

"Frank knows what he's takin' about," cackled the old timer. "He was wishin' half the time that we'd left *him* behind."

"Ye lie, ye old shpalpeen!" yelled Frank. "'Tis more than a broken back and all the skin off me seat that would hold me back from a chance to get me hands on Miss Kate's abductors. And well ye know it, ye auld—"

"Grub pile comin' now, grunted Tonto suddenly, as footsteps and a clatter of dishes approached the tent.

"Hivven be praised!" shouted Frank MacDowell. " 'Tis hungry men we all are, and thanks be that it's me back and not me stomach that's broken to pieces."

Two cook's helpers set down the loaded trays, which the men promptly attacked. They ate in silence, Clem having refused to speak another word until the last helping was devoured and washed down with more whiskey.

Dave swallowed his own impatience perforce, but it seemed to him an endless time before Clem pushed back his chair, loosened his waistband, and bit off a fresh chew from his plug. This properly placed in the back of his cheek, the old timer continued his story.

He told of the fruitless stalk upon the abandoned cabin, of the wild chase down through the hills, of the discovery that they were following the trail of two outlaws by mistake, of the brief battle before the latter surrendered, and of the near hanging which followed. He dwelt briefly on the rescue party's disappointment, and longer on the Lone Ranger's determination to pick up Kate's trail and follow it to the end. Then, drawing the outlaws' signed confession from his shirt pocket, he placed the sweat-stained pages in Dave's hands.

"That's the whole business, set down in plain writin', signed by them two skunks and witnessed by four good men and true, includin' Tonto, who's a whiter man than most of 'em who boast about their color. Put it away safe, Dave, in the safest place you can find, because we paid high for it. We give up the pleasure of hangin' them same two reptiles right where we caught 'em, and of knowin' the job was done!"

Listlessly young Walton unlocked the camp's strong-box beside him, placed the confessions inside, and then sank back in his chair with eyes closed. Hope, which had pulsed a little while before, now seemed a weak and fragile thing to him. Kate in the hands of a pursued and

angry kidnapper, of whom nothing had been heard for three days, was the picture which haunted his mind, and it was not reassuring.

"She'll come back, son. There ain't no doubt whatsoever, with that Ranger man on her trail. And don't you think any different!" Old Clem's voice was strangely gentle.

"I wish I could believe it." Dave passed a white hand wearily over his aching eyes. "I wish I could believe it, but there's too much chance for things to go wrong. Even if he does find her, she may be—she may have—. Boys, I doubt if I'll have the heart to go on, to do my work, thinking of what may have happened, of what may be happening to her this very minute. After all, what does the road matter, what does anything matter now? It's no use—"

"Nonsense!" howled Frank MacDowell, slamming his great fist upon the table so that the dishes leaped.

" 'Tis nonsense you're talkin', me boy! Miss Kate is comin' back, I tell ye! Back to this railroad and to the man she believes in! And when she comes, phwat in Tophet d'ye think she'll want to see? A broken coward? A sick quitter without honor and without a job? A man without shame,—her man? She'd rather the bloody savages had killed her first, and even then her spirit would come back to ha'nt ye if ye quit now. Put your back up this instant, lad, or as Frank MacDowell's a true man he'll slap ye down like the weak pup ye'd be if ye failed us all now. And what I left of ye, Auld Clem and Tonto here would throw out on the dump without a tear. Am I right?" He swung round upon the other two, his heavy face aflame with passion.

"Ugh! You bet."

"You're right as rain, Frank! If he lets us down now, he's lower than them two yaller bellies we've jest shet up in the hoosegow!"

Slowly Dave stood up on his one good leg, his face suddenly as red as MacDowell's. "Boys", he choked, "you *are* right. And there'll be no more talk of quitting.

"And now,—if you'll be so kind as to leave me alone, I think I'll lie down."

"Lie down sound good," said Tonto meaningly. "But sleep be better!"

Dave smiled wanly at his friends as they gathered at the tent door. "I won't let you down, men. I'll work for you,—and for Kate," he added under his breath.

That same afternoon the Lone Ranger was pressing even deeper into the hill country, following the now clearly defined trail of Glencoe and Kate Stevens. The tracks, upon closer inspection than he had given to those of the outlaws, were unmistakably those of Kate's mare and the tall bay. Though he had spent many precious hours in getting needed rest for this new chase, Silver's master allowed himself to entertain increasing hopes of success. Tracking through such a country, over many different kinds of grounds, was, to be sure, a matter of slower progress than the steady gait of the fugitives; but sooner or later he would overtake them at whatever rendezvous Glencoe might have planned, and at that rendezvous at least two outlaws would be missing. The thought gave him grim satisfaction.

Sunset had all but come when the Lone Ranger pulled up with a low cry of dismay. The double trail had ended,—ended abruptly in a trampled stretch of ground half a dozen yards in width. Innumerable unshod hoofs had passed that way, followed by the double marks of many Indian *travois*—the crude litters used to carry squaws with their children and baggage. At least half a tribe of Sioux redskins had cut across the trail of the girl and her abductor!

Anxiously the Lone Ranger spurred forward, searching up and down for the many hundreds of yards on the

opposite side of the hoof-marked track for the signs of shod horses. Finding them would mean that they had passed either before or after the migrating Indians.

But when the last daylight had faded, those signs were not yet found.

If another had been there to see, he must have remarked upon the iron control with which the Lone Ranger curbed his anxiety and his impatience. Ordinary men in his place might have gone supperless to a sleepless bed, unable to wait calmly for the dawn. But years of varied though often bitter experience with the wilderness and its surprises had only strengthened this strange man's mastery of his own thoughts and feelings. Calmly, and as if forgetting his recent ominous discovery, he built a tiny fire, cooked and ate his supper, and fell instantly asleep, trusting Silver to give warning of any danger that might approach under cover of darkness. And he slept soundly until half an hour before dawn.

With the first clear light of day, the Ranger was at work, now searching on foot for the marks of iron horse-shoes. It was not long before he found them. But as he feared, instead of crossing the path of the unshod ponies, they continued, mingled with them. There were only two answers possible to this discovery:—either Glencoe had found friends among the Indians, or else he and the girl had been taken captive. The latter was more probable.

Danger both for the pair he was following and for himself was now tremendously increased, along with the difficulty of even locating the girl in time. This the Ranger realized. But one fact partly balanced the grimness of his outlook, even rousing some measure of hope. It was not likely that the savages would kill the girl under circumstances where there had been no armed resistance to her capture. Her youth and beauty would

protect her from extreme violence, and her value as the future possession of some chief would probably keep her, at least for a time, from being pawed by savage hands.

For Glencoe, except in the unlikely case that he had a powerful friend in this particular band, the outlook was not so bright. But that fact certainly did not add to the Ranger's worries. It even caused him to smile briefly as he took up the risky business ahead of him, of trailing the war-wise Sioux through their native hills to their own tepees.

But still another discovery lay in wait for the tracker. A few miles farther on, a metallic glitter at one side of the trail brought him to a sudden stop. The object, half buried in dust, proved to be nothing more startling than a bent and twisted piece of iron about two inches long; but its meaning to the Ranger was important. It was a horse-shoe nail recently drawn, and it signified what he immediately verified by examining the trampled road beyond. The shoes had been removed from the horses ridden by Kate and Glencoe, so that from now on there would be nothing to distinguish their tracks. If the migration should break up, the difficulty of trailing the captives would be multiplied several times.

The trail did break up before the end of that day. Within the space of a few miles five separate bands, numbering twenty to forty riders each with several *travois* following, split off and took their several ways. The buffalo hunting season was not yet over, and groups of this size often preferred to work separately for a time before returning to the main tribal encampment.

For more than a week the Lone Ranger trailed and circled, stalked and spied and back-tracked, covering the various bands, and watching in vain for a sight of Kate Stevens or a sign of her presence. Then, despairing of these tactics, he took a still bolder course, which was to kidnap by night one of the Indians' horse guards and

carry him away from under the very noses of his companions.

This feat was made even more difficult and dangerous by the Ranger's unwillingness to stun the savage first, since he wanted him for questioning only, and an injured captive might be a sullen one. Nothing would be likely to frighten the savage into giving information, for the Sioux "braves" were true to their title.

By a superb piece of stalking, the Lone Ranger did crawl one night to within striking distance of a savage, whose thoughts were probably more occupied with some dark-skinned maiden of his acquaintance than with the horse herd he had been assigned to guard. The Sioux was choked into silence, then gagged and bound helpless without any alarm being given. But the chances of failure which he had run had brought out upon the captor's forehead a perspiration which remained until Silver had carried him and his prize a safe three miles away.

There the Lone Ranger removed his prisoner's gag and the ropes from his legs; and standing before him, spoke tersely in the native Sioux tongue.

"The warrior need have no anxiety. I do not wish his scalp, but only what his tongue may tell me. After that, he will be free to go back to his companions. Is the warrior ready to speak?"

The question was met by a blank silence, and after a moment the Ranger continued.

"I understand. You do not wish to speak words which might harm others of your tribe. Nor do I wish you to give me such knowledge. I am searching for a white woman who was captured by your company before it broke up to hunt the buffalo. Can you give me any word of her?"

Suddenly the Indian laughed. "I will tell you, white man, because you can never use my words to recapture her. And for that I am somewhat sorry, because only a

great warrior could have carried Yellow Eagle off, tied up like a papoose. Iron Hand, the great chief, has claimed your white woman and has taken her to the main encampment of the Sioux. I can even tell you where that is, if you do not know. It lies thirty miles to the south, between two hills shaped like buffalo skulls. If you go there you will find Iron Hand and the white woman, and also death, if you approach too near."

The Sioux laughed again. "I should like to see you, white warrior, tied to the torture stake. Your courage would bring great honor to your captors, before you drank the flames."

The Ranger stooped and raised the Indian by his bound arms, then faced him eye to eye. "Mine has been the honor of capturing a brave warrior," he said evenly. "I do not wish that he should return to his camp bound and shamed. If I cut your bonds, will you promise not to resist, but to start back at once? You should reach the horse herd again before your absence is discovered."

The redskin's eyeballs flashed white in the starlight. "I give you the word of a Sioux!" he replied. "It is a cheap price for my honor."

Swiftly the Ranger's knife slid through the last cords which bound the Sioux's hands, and just as swiftly he swung into Silver's saddle. Nothing more was said, no further sign was exchanged. Two brave men parted, and the prairie swallowed them up.

Throughout the night Silver's tireless lope ate up the desert miles—ten, twenty, twenty-five, and thirty; and before pale light streaked the morning sky, he and his master were hidden safely in thick cover within rifle shot of the great Sioux encampment, where, according to the brave's tale, waited Iron Hand and Kate Stevens's safety must come before anything else.

XV

WHERE ROADS MEET

Back at the railroad, days crashed and rumbled past like units of an endless train, as it seemed to Dave Walton,—like vast, phantom trucks crammed with dust and iron and men, under the searing sun-heat. Sometimes he felt that they were crushing his mind and body, as a frog is crushed between hot steel rail and iron wheel. Endlessly these roaring days were reproduced in his dreams at night, and endlessly he fought his three-fold battle against pain, against the fear for Kate that gnawed at his vitals, and against time,—for the road from the East must meet that from the West on schedule, whatever the cost.

The work was like a raging giant, driving trains and men and mules alike mercilessly with ever-growing momentum. Gangs worked in shifts until ready to drop, then fed and fell asleep while other gangs toiled in their places. So many rails to the minute, so many hundred minutes to the mile, and every one of those minutes begrudged by the sweating, work-mad laborers. Gang bosses worked with their men, setting the pace with their own hands for that increasing, Herculean effort. And mile by mile the new, rust-red rails pushed forward over the ties. Only in snatched moments between work and sleep did these brawny, furious toilers remember that they were human, and then it was always with a start of surprise; for they seemed, even to themselves, like mechanical parts of a tremendous over-driven engine.

In a way the great, inhuman, absorbing personality

of the railroad was a boon to Dave Walton, for it allowed him to forget most of the time the pain in his heart and the wound-fever in his body. He grew even thinner as the day of final completion approached, driving himself and his men as if flesh and blood were just so much material to be used up by the great purpose which animated them, and afterwards to be cast aside. Only rarely now did he recall that it was almost a month from the day when he and Kate had left the old camp full of laughter and great hopes for the hour when men and steel should have bound the wilderness finally to the world of commerce. And his friends, Clem, Tim Holley, Frank MacDowell, and many others including the faithful Tonto, encouraged him to forget for the time being.

The rails met on a brilliant summer day made more brilliant by the gaiety of a great celebration. Brass bands and colored bunting, glittering uniforms of the military, and the gala dress of crowds, blazed under a desert sun. High officials met, exchanging words of congratulation, bestowing praises. The Vice-President of the United States, the governor of a growing and wealthy Pacific commonwealth, directing officers of the Road, gathered for the climax of the occasion. The last spikes to be driven, spikes of shining gold and silver, were presented by the hands of famous men. A telegraph operator had been appointed to wire the news when the last spike was driven into the last wooden tie.

The crowd surged closer, flanked by laborers of four races, White, Negro, Mexican, and Chinese. The greatest moment of all had arrived!

But Dave Walton, standing with the group of engineers especially honored, saw it all as somehow unreal, as a pageant seen in a dream by one who seemed to take part but who was actually a disembodied witness. Reality belonged where Kate Stevens was. But she was not here. So Dave remained in his dream, while

the crowd roared the triumph of a nation's vision, over the railroad which he had helped to complete. The eloquent speeches of great men, high in that nation's esteem, were only distant noises scarcely reaching his ears. Only one word had any meaning for him now, a girl's name, burned in his soul.

At last he found himself drifting with the other engineers of his party through the dispersing throng, and caught a phrase of conversation from time to time, as the group neared an open space in the crowd, giving a view of the dry Utah plains backed by distant peaks. A man immediately ahead stopped short and pointed. "By Jove, that fellow's coming late for the show! Looks like he's got a squaw behind his saddle! Won't she be pleased to have missed the fun!"

Dave's eyes followed the man's pointing finger automatically. As yet not even the familiar prairie before him seemed real. Then his eyes focused and he stood stock still, his heart pounding. Though still a good distance off, the newcomer's horse appeared to shine in the sun like polished silver. Could it be—?

Forgetting his still painful leg, and dropping the heavy cane on which he had been limping, Dave Walton tore himself free from the surprised members of his party. He was running now at full speed, but to him each stride seemed intolerably slow. The silver horse and his double load came gradually nearer; and as if fearing the closer attention of the gala crowd, the rider wore over his eyes a black mask. His voice rang out, "Come on, Silver!" A moment later he pulled his horse to a stop, and the woman seated behind him slipped lightly to the ground. For an instant she stared bewilderedly at the milling herd of human beings, until her eyes caught the rider's pointing arm. With a cry she ran forward.

Dave Walton had stopped suddenly with sinking heart. His longing, his tremendous hope must have

betrayed him, he thought, passing a shaking hand over his eyes. This female figure approaching him on swift moccasined feet was only an Indian squaw in buckskin shirt and jacket. Her dark hair hung in two braids on either breast. But why was she running toward *him*? His eyes fastened again on the squaw's face,—and then the world seemed to spin like a dizzy top. It was—it could not be—but it was she—Kate!

Kate's own hands caught him, kept him from sinking. Kate's cheek was against his, then her lips were on his mouth. The world held nothing more! After some unmeasurable moments, Dave grew aware that Kate was calling his attention to something beyond the wonder of herself. She was telling him to look away, out into the prairie—for what? Then he saw, and knew that the far-off rider in a tiny, retreating cloud of dust was the Lone Ranger on his horse, Silver.

That evening, in a luxurious private car which had carried certain high officials of the railroad to the celebration, six persons heard Kate's story of what had occurred from the time of her flight with Glencoe from the deserted trapper's cabin until the moment of her arrival that afternoon.

Old Clem, an ornate brass cuspidore within easy range, sat uncomfortably in an upholstered chair. Tim Holley and Frank MacDowell occupied similar chairs, with somewhat less awkwardness. Dave sat near a softly lighted table beside Kate, who had changed her buckskins for borrowed civilized clothing; while in a corner lounged a stout, white-haired gentleman whose clothes and manners spoke wealth and power to command. This personage was Henry Danvers, the contractor for whom Dave and his father had built the last hard stretch of the new road. The corner which he had chosen was in shadow, suggesting that the man of power and culture wished to be for the moment

inconspicuous. Against the wall and also in shadow crouched the half-breed Tonto; and side by side these two Americans of such different race and culture listened with rapt attention to the girl's tale.

Kate had already sketched in the events leading up to Glencoe's final flight, and was speaking now of their capture by the red scouts that had led the large company of hunting Sioux. "I think," her clear, musical voice went on, "that Glencoe was more angry than scared, but even he realized how useless it would be to resist. The Indians tied him and fastened his feet to the stirrups; but they did not even tie my arms. For that matter, I was so frightened that I hardly cared what they did, if they would only keep their pawing hands away. Fortunately the chief, Iron Hand, was not far behind them, and he put me immediately under his protection. That, as it turned out, was to be more effective than I dared hope, throughout the time that I spent with the savages. Of course, I had no illusions about what this kind treatment signified, for I knew that to the savage, no matter how great a chief he may be, a woman captive is just so much property; and but for the Lone Ranger, I should probably now be one of his wives or else dead."

The girl shuddered. "I can't say which I would have preferred, though undoubtedly Iron Hand was a gentleman according to his own savage standards. At any rate, his claim upon me prevented all other danger or annoyance to my person. Of course they took away Beauty, my little black mare. I think Iron Hand gave her to one of the savages who had captured me. And the squaws claimed all my clothing, giving me in exchange a fairly clean suit of deerskins. But that I did not greatly mind; in fact, it was something of a thrill to play at being a real wild-Indian squaw such as I had dreamed of when I was a child back home.

"The only brutal sight I had to witness on all the long

trip to the Sioux encampment was the way they treated poor Glencoe. The savage who had captured him claimed him as a prisoner of war, and proceeded to make life miserable from then on. His hands were never untied except when they gave him scraps and leavings to eat. They allowed him very little water, and kept abusing him with slaps and insults and threats, which I am sure he understood, as he knew a good many Sioux words. I did not get a chance to speak to him except once when his guard led him near one morning on their way to the horses. I could only say, 'I'm so sorry,' but I doubt if he even heard me.

"I never had thought there were so many Indians in all the West as I saw when I reached the main camp, or so many dogs, scrawny, snappish curs who lived on whatever garbage the camp supplied. There must have been hundreds of brutes. And the tepees, set up in long rows and close together, looked like acres of queer, pointed cakes baking under the sun. I would have been thrilled by the experience if I had dreamed that there was any way of escape, but I did not dare to think of what might be in store for me, and—"

She looked at her lover with misty eyes. "I was sick with fear for you, Dave. I thought they had probably killed you. And for that reason I didn't care so much what happened to me after all."

Dave seized her hand impulsively and held it while she continued.

"I was given the liberty of nearly the whole camp, since it was impossible for me to escape, and I can't begin to tell you of all that I saw and heard in the two weeks I spent there. And when I say 'heard', I don't mean that I understood anything that they said in Sioux. There was one or two Indian women who knew a few words of English, but if any of the men understood my language, they gave no sign of it,—I suppose because I was Iron

Hand's property. I tried to forget myself in making friends with the smaller children, but even among them it was only the little girls who made any response. I suppose the little boys considered themselves warriors from the age of three upwards, and too proud to pay much attention to a woman.

"Iron Hand had left again on a short hunting trip almost immediately, after leaving me in the care of his two squaws, whom I called Tweedledee and Tweedledum because they looked to me just alike and I couldn't pronounce their Indian names. I could see that they hated me, doubtless because they knew I was to be Iron Hand's new wife and were jealous. But he must have put them under strict orders regarding my treatment, for I was given a tepee all to myself, and three meals a day of the best the camp afforded. To be sure, the food was monotonous; but nobody had or wanted anything better, apparently, than meat and corn cakes and a few berries now and then.

"For almost two weeks I was unable to learn anything about Glencoe's fate, and I had not seen him since we arrived. I supposed that they were keeping him prisoner for some purpose; but what that purpose was, I did not learn until almost the end of my stay.

"Then one night, not long after supper, Tweedledee and Tweedledum came to my tepee, and taking me one by each arm, led me to a spot near the center of the encampment, where almost everybody in the vicinity seemed to be gathered. At first I could not make out what the gathering was for, but I was soon enlightened, as room was made for Iron Hand's two squaws and me near the front of the crowd of women. Then I realized that we had been given orchestra seats, so to speak, at a scene which might have been copied from the infernal regions. Twelve thick posts had been set out into the ground about six feet apart in a semi-circle, and twelve

men were bound to them by feet and hands and neck. Several bonfires had been lighted for the spectacle and were already flaming high enough to show even the expressions on the prisoners' faces. I knew that the twelve men were to be tortured and burned alive.

"What kept me from fainting then and there, I cannot tell, but I did get terribly sick, and for some time sensed only dimly what was going on. I remember that there was some sort of a horrid dance performed by some of the warriors, and later a pandemonium of howls and screams broke out that made me cover my ears.

"It was soon after that when Tweedledee and Tweedledum snatched away my hands and began pinching me cruelly. I tried to shut my eyes, but they pinched harder and rubbed their hands upward over my face until I had to look.

"Don't ask me to tell you all I saw. It was too utterly frightful,—things that will haunt my dreams as long as I live. They were not torturing all the prisoners at once, but beginning at one end of the semi-circle and taking each poor victim in turn,—I suppose so as to add to the others' agony by letting each see what was coming to him. I managed to keep my eyes away from most of it in spite of the squaws' pinching me, until they came to the fourth captive. Then I stared, without will-power to turn my eyes away.

"The man was Glencoe, half naked and bound exactly like the others. I think it was the expression of his face that fascinated me. I am sure now that the man had gone mad, either before or immediately after being brought to the stake. At any rate he was laughing, the strangest, weirdest laughter that I have ever seen, while his eyes looked straight ahead with the whites showing clearly in the firelight. Of course I could not hear him, with all the noise about; but if he made any sound, it must have been crazy too. Whatever stories they may tell about

savages sparing crazy people for superstitious reasons, his madness was of only one benefit to poor Glencoe. He certainly did not realize what was going on, even when they began his torture."

Kate stopped, shuddering, and then went on in a horror-stricken voice, as if the scene were being re-enacted before her.

"They stuck splinters into him, into his fingers and arm and feet, and set them afire one by one. They cut him with their knives about the face and chest, and all the while he was laughing that same crazy, staring laugh as if he felt nothing. Then one of the savages came up to him with an iron bar, white hot at the end, and held it for a few seconds close to Glencoe's eyes. Above all the howling and racket I caught one long, hideous shriek, and saw what was left of the man slump down upon the ropes that held him. I think Glencoe died then; at any rate, I'm certain he was unconscious until they fired a pile of wood about his stake and he was hidden by the smoke and flames.

"I must have really fainted then, because when I was next able to feel Iron Hand's amiable wives pinching and slapping me, they were about to begin on the last man left alive of the twelve captives; and recognizing this second white man, I had the worst shock of all since I saw you, Dave, shot down back there in the pine grove!

"This time the squaws had no trouble keeping my eyes open. I looked until I thought they would drop out of my head. Then I rubbed them and looked again. But there could be no mistake—it was the Lone Ranger!

"His clothes had been taken from him, and the dancing firelight cast shadows over his features; but there was no doubt about his face, or even about his carriage as he stood straight up against that terrible

stake. He was as calm as any of the stoical savages had been, when they came to him. I think he even smiled and spoke to those fiends as they made ready to begin his torture; and I could see from their manner that even they were impressed. I learned later that they had given him the post of honor, at the end of the line of victims.

"Of course, I did not think of that then, for only one overwhelming thought was in my mind—that he was there meeting torture and death because of me! For no other reason would he have come near enough to the encampment or have put himself into a position where capture was likely.

"I saw them preparing the splinters to thrust into his flesh, and I believe that at that moment I should have lost consciousness again, if there had not been an interruption.

"An unusually tall and powerful savage broke his way into the ring of blood-drunk torturers, scattering them with great sweeps of his long arms. Then he drew a knife and cut the thongs which tied the Ranger. And as he faced the firelight I recognized the rescuer for Iron Hand.

"After that the crowd closed in on the two of them so that I could not see what immediately followed. I believe I tried to break through the crowd myself, but Tweedledee and Tweedledum dragged me back to my tepee and pushed me inside.

"The next thing I knew must have been many hours later. I awoke to hear voices at the tepee entrance, and the next instant Iron Hand and the Lone Ranger stood before me. I sprang up and—Dave, I won't even ask you to forgive me—I think I hugged and kissed our Ranger friend until he held me away at arms length. He was frightfully embarrassed,—that I do remember!

"Anyhow, he told me simply that it was morning, and that we ought to be starting back to the railroad.

Somehow, I didn't even think that strange, after what I had seen the night before. I simply told him, All right; and that I hadn't anything to pack, so that the sooner we get started the better. I believe we were mounted and riding out of camp on Silver within a half an hour.

"During the three days it took that wonderful horse to carry us here, I managed to fill in the rest of the story by 'pumping' the Ranger for details of what happened just before and just after that horrible few hours he was tied to the stake. Our Ranger friend is impossibly modest, you know, and it was hard work to make him tell anything about himself.

"Dave, he is the bravest man we shall ever know, and the truest friend!

"You know that he trailed me alone for nearly two weeks, tracking the five or six different bands into which the big party of Sioux had split up. That in itself was a tremendous task. He must have run uncounted risks of discovery and capture, trailing and spying on those small groups of wild hunters, and all the time with no trace of me until he managed to capture and question a brave who was guarding a horse herd at night.

"What the Sioux told him brought him straight to the main encampment, where he lay in hiding for half of the following day, trying to think out some scheme of rescue.

"Of course, actual rescue was not possible, even for him to contrive, as he discovered after watching the camp for awhile. But there was one final course open to him. He knew Iron Hand, having once saved the redskin's life from a wounded buffalo after Iron Hand's horse had fallen with a broken leg.

"Whether the chief would choose to remember that debt (it happened years ago when Iron Hand was a mere boy), the Ranger could not tell. In fact, their meeting had been brief, and he really knew nothing about the

savage's personal character. But he felt that he must take the chance of demanding me from Iron Hand, or else give up his purpose altogether.

"Knowing the Lone Ranger as you all do," Kate said, turning to her roughly-dressed friends who had listened with bated breath since she began, "—knowing him as you do, you can guess his next step.

"He had decided before noon of that first day near the encampment what action to take; and having decided, he curled up where he was and slept until near sunset. Then, mounting Silver, he circled around to approach the camp in full view, and rode directly in!

"The very rashness of this move saved him from being molested until he had reached the very center of the encampment, where he stopped short and asked the whereabouts of Iron Hand. There were hundreds of savages crowding about him by this time but for a moment they were silenced by their own astonishment at his calm boldness, and by wonder at what his game might be.

"Then one of the crowd laughed aloud, saying that Iron Hand was away hunting, as the stranger doubtless knew very well. Also that Iron Hand would be the first to drag him from his horse if he were present!

"That spoiled everything, of course; because, as it happened, Iron Hand was away temporarily, and no one in camp had heard that the chief had ever been the friend of any white man. The crowd dragged the Ranger from his horse, and tied him up.

"There was a good deal of dispute as to whether or not they should keep him alive until the hunting chief returned. But, as there were several prisoners scheduled to be tortured that very same night, the majority decided not to wait. However, they gave the Ranger the post of honor among the captives, in recognition of his courage in entering the camp alone.

"I told you before how Iron Hand, returning unexpectedly, recognized and saved him from the stake in the nick of time; and,—well, there isn't very much more to say. Iron Hand bought Silver back from the savage who had claimed the horse, and gave him back to his master. Fortunately no one in camp had any way of judging Silver's real value, excepting by his size and beauty; for nobody had been able to mount him since the Ranger's capture."

Kate stopped speaking, and looked around at the rapt faces of her friends, then lowered her eyes, blushing. "I—I'm afraid I've made my story entirely too long," she said. "But I have lived it over so many times during the last three days that I couldn't have told it any quicker or left out anything once I began!"

Henry Danvers rose to his feet, and moving over to Kate, took both her hands. "We wouldn't have had you leave out a word of it, young lady," he said with fatherly earnestness. "And we won't spoil your wonderful story with many words of our own. I should like to ask you two questions, however, if you will pardon an old man's curiosity. Who is this wonderful man who brought you back, and whom you call the Lone Ranger? I'm not so much interested in his mere name as in who he is, or has been, in this great, half-tamed West. And I should like to know also why he went away without waiting to receive the thanks of his friends and his admirers."

Kate shook her head, smiling up at the strong, kindly face of the financier. "I don't believe, Mr. Danvers, that anybody here has heard his real name, except possibly Tonto, and he has never told it. The Lone Ranger, for all the great things he has done for us and, no doubt, for many other people in the past, chooses for some reason to be a man of mystery. All of us who have known him have known him simply as our friend, and that is all that matters really."

Frank MacDowell shifted his great bulk in the luxurious easy-chair where he sat, and his rich brogue filled the car with a warm vibrance. "Ye've said a true word there, Miss Kate. 'Tis all that matters, and 'tis enough for any man or woman of the West. Such friendship is rarely come by, like a foiné jewel. But 'tis better than any jewel, since many can share it. I speak for us all now, I think, when I say God bless the Lone Ranger."

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